THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

NOVEMBER, 1957

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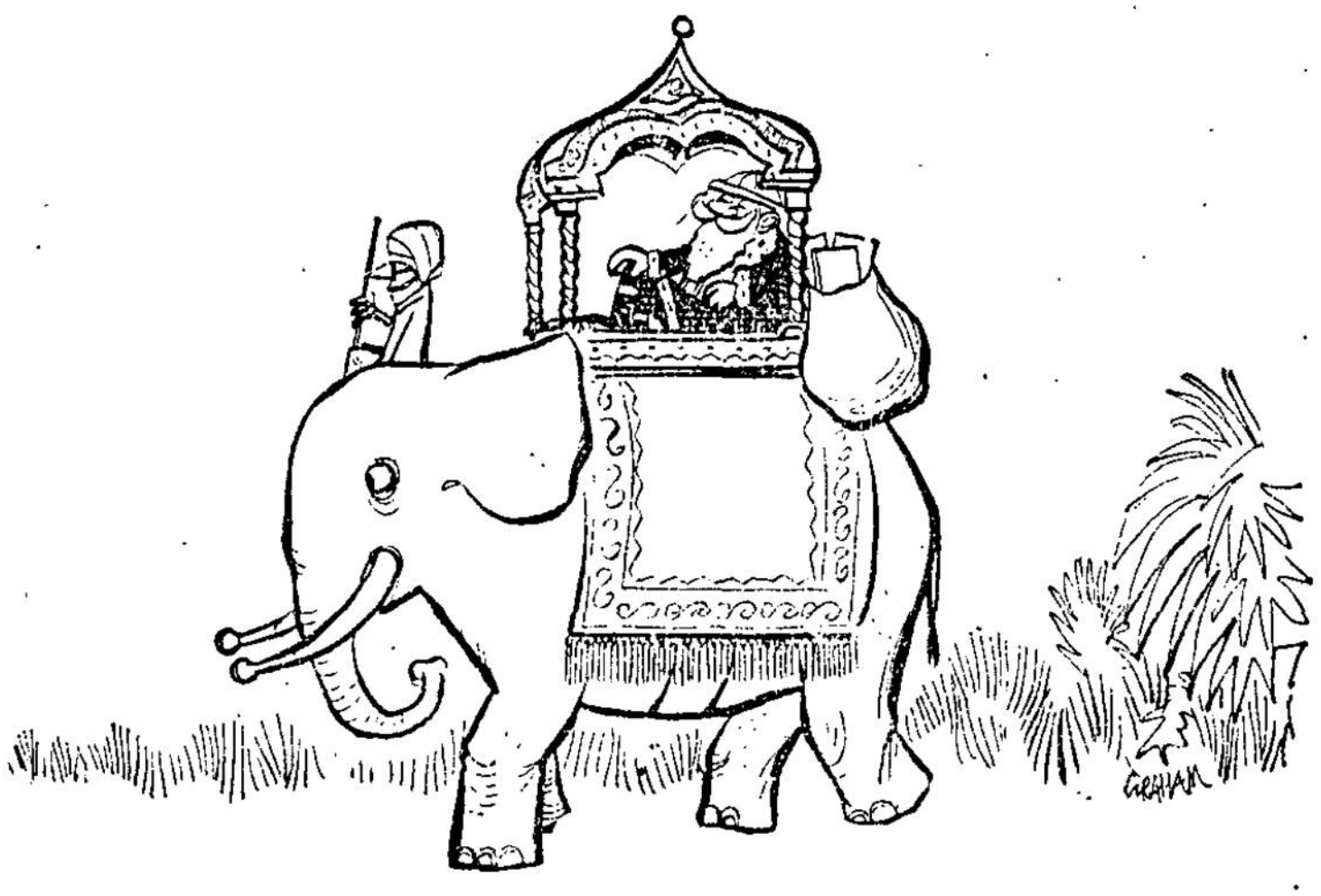

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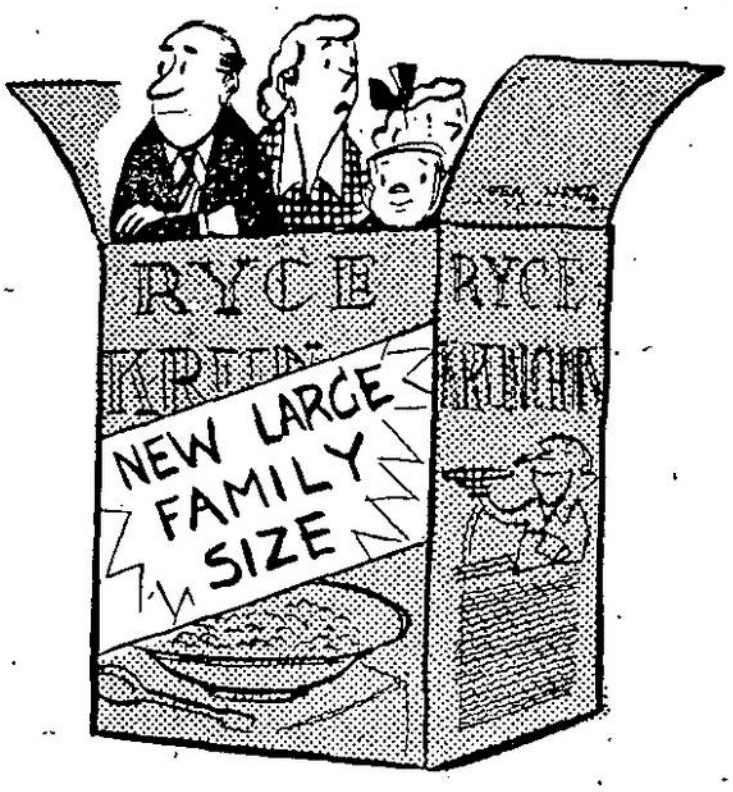


Log Book

NOWADAYS everything is rapidly becoming either larger or smaller. This sounds like one of those axioms in Chapter One of a philosophical treatise which delude the student into thinking that it is all going to be as easy as pie—until he runs into an impasse like " The relations which relate terms are an integral part of the terms they relate." Yes, no doubt, but that doesn't seem to *get* you very far . . .

Our statement is plainly true, though, as any Argosy reader who cares to look around him can prove for himself.

Most things are getting bigger: take, for instance, cinema screens, which will soon require a two-headed audience; take giant double-daffodils; take electric toasters, in which the tiny slices of toast are quite lost; lawn-mowers, now nearly half the size of the average lawn; pedigree pigs, Sunday papers, packets of breakfast cereal. The last two items, indeed, come into severe conflict, since fathers of families have to spend most of Sunday breakfast absorbing the information on the sides of giant Ryce Krunchies packets before they can get down to the film reviews, while their children delve about for the free space guns inside, scattering Krunchies all over the room.

Among the things becoming smaller we find armchairs, six-penny rockets, portions of welsh rarebit in pubs, cars . . . Cars are a particularly rewarding study, since they are shooting in both directions at once—inflating into mammoths that need the whole of Piccadilly Circus to manœuvre in, reducing into tiny bubbles the size of grasshoppers.

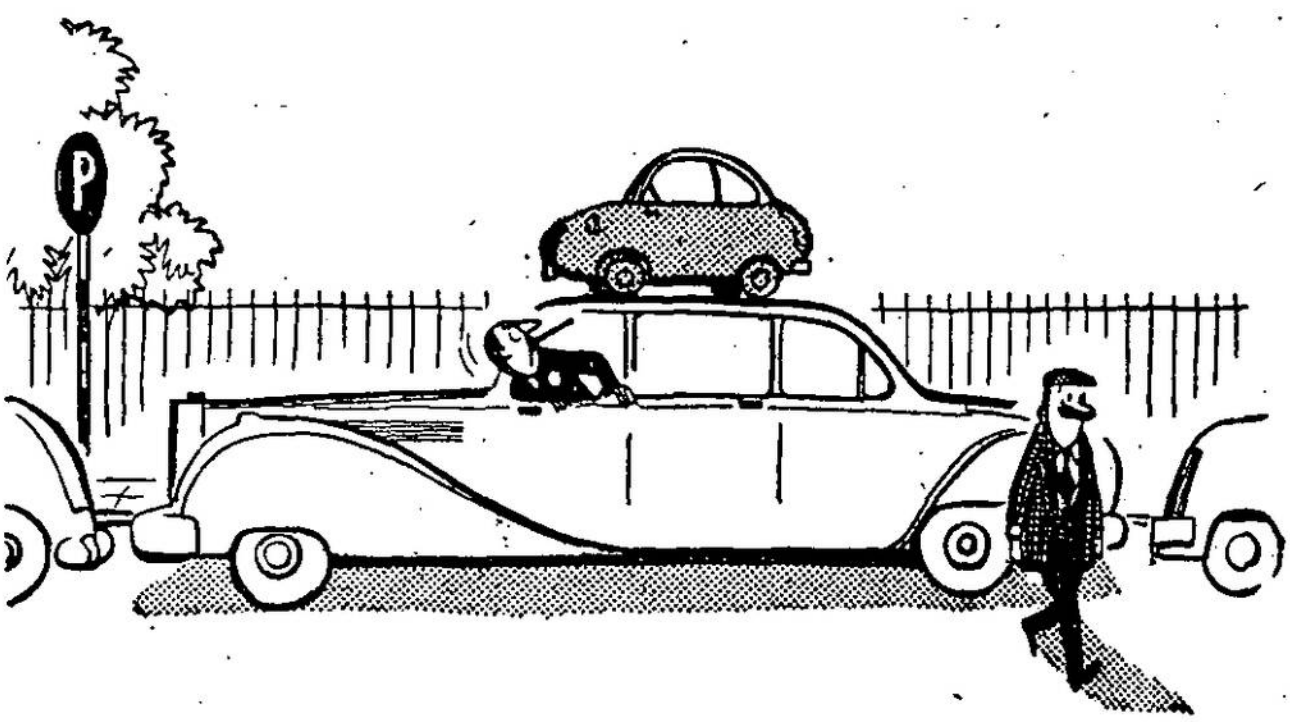
Any minute now, we feel, we shall see posters: " Free! A full-size bubble-car and ten gallons of petrol inside every family-size

packet of Breakfast Bricks ! " Something of the kind is certainly needed to induce wretched housewives to stagger home with those immense crates of corn derivatives.

And that will be a happy day for Argosy readers since Argosy, thank heaven, neither swells nor shrinks but continues to be a hundred and forty-four pages of absorbing reading-matter that will fit handily into your pocket—and cram with you into your carlet for a peaceful excursion into the country.

Eric Linklater was born in 1899, is married, and has four children. He lives in Ross, in the north of Scotland. He was educated at Aberdeen University, where he studied medicine. Abandoning medical studies he worked in Bombay as assistant editor to the Times of India, returned in 1927 by way of Persia, Batum, Constantinople, and Vienna, to a position in Aberdeen University. During the Second World War he served in the Royal Engineers, commanding Orkney Fortress ; transferred to the War Office Directorate of Public Relations. He was Rector of Aberdeen University from 1945–48, acted as Temporary Lieutenant Colonel in Korea in 1951. His writing is well known for its enchanting combination of highland humour and Celtic fantasy; it ranges from picaresque and rollicking novels such as *Poet's Pub* and *Juan in America* to serious—or at least controversial —plays like *The Raft* and *Crisis in Heaven.*

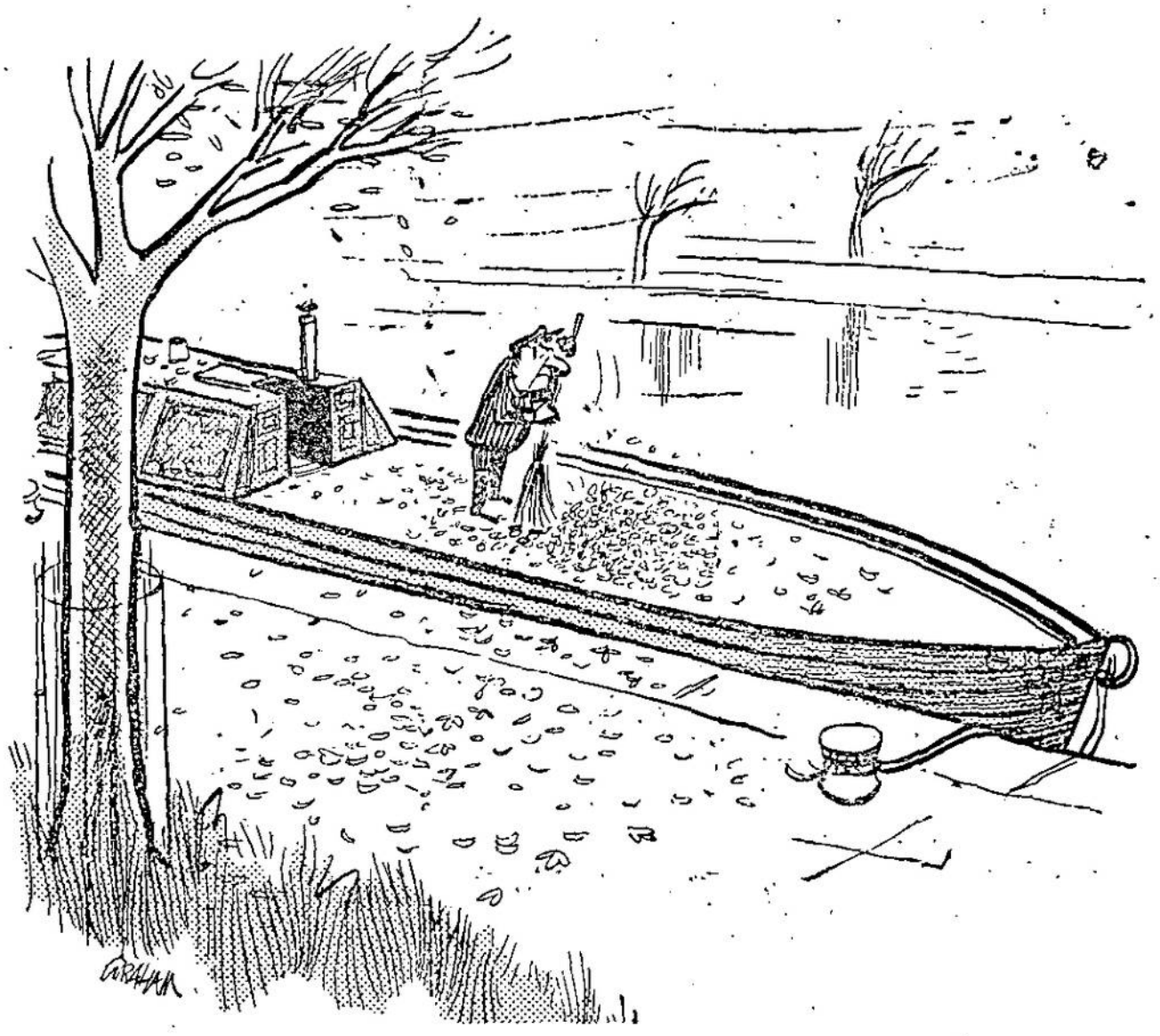
In the romantic tradition of the great sea writers, ten-year-old **Jan de Hartog** ran away from his home in the Netherlands to work on a fishing-boat. Later, as he says, he went respectable by entering Amsterdam Naval College but was expelled within a few months with the terse explanation, " This school is not for pirates." He began writing in his spare time when working for



the Amsterdam Harbour Police and had an instant success with stories and plays. During the German occupation he fought in the Resistance, and escaped to England where he was soon writing with equal facility in English, and had made enough to buy a large boat, the *Rival*, in which he lives with his wife (a daughter of J. B. Priestley) and two children. The family have a nomadic existence sailing round the European coasts and, recently, the waterways of Eastern America. His best-known books are *Captain Jan* and *The Little Ark*.

Angus Wilson spent his childhood in South Africa, went to Westminster School, and on to Oxford. During World War II he worked in the Foreign Office, after the war was given the job of replacing the 200,000 volumes of the British Museum Library which had been destroyed by bombing. He was Deputy Superintendent of the Museum Reading Room from 1949–55. He published his first volume of short stories, *The Wrong Set*, when he was thirty-five; it was followed by *Such Darling Dodos*. His play, *The Mulberry Bush*, was produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1956. Novels, famous for their brilliant satirical insight, are *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes* and *Hemlock and After*.

JOHN SILVER



GO HOME DEAD MAN

What lay in wait behind his own front door?

BY KEM BENNETT

"GUNS, yes," Middleton said equably. "Currencies, yes. Diamonds, yes. In fact anything—anything but dope or State secrets. I was brought up on *Bulldog Drummond* . . ."

Harringam looked at him bleakly. Middleton's lazy belligerence was far beyond his comprehension. He could observe, but could not understand it.

"When I first employed you, you undertook to fly cargoes wherever I directed, and to ask no questions." His voice was flat and metallic.

"I haven't asked any questions," Middleton assured him. "I've used my head, that's all. I hate to sound melodramatic, but the fact is that you're a master-spy and you are working against England, which happens to be my country. I'm resigning. In fact, I have resigned. All I have to do now is to make up my mind whether to go to the police."

Harringam stared at him wordlessly, all emotion concealed behind the enigma of his expressionless face. In his innocence, David Middleton stared back. Queer bird, he thought, no soul . . . must have sold it. All brains and will, no guts, no humanity. The fact that Harringam was dangerous registered in his mind, but his reaction was no more than casual. He had spent most of his life in danger of one kind and another.

"How did you discover that I was an agent?" Harringam asked in his passionless voice.

Middleton grinned. "If I go to the police they may tell you," he said. "You can keep my money for the last trip. Good morning."

"Fool!" Harringam said it as if it were a statement of fact, not a word of abuse.

Five minutes later, looking like a commercial traveller in a baggy brown suit and a shapeless hat, Victor Harringam left the offices of Harringam's Import-Export Ltd. He walked away in the

direction of Earls Court. He was inconspicuous, drab, and deadly as a puff adder.

The African's name was Jenkins. It sat upon his black lithe-ness as uncomfortably as a bowler hat on the head of a farmer's boy. He was long and lean. His face bore old tribal markings, weals of scar tissue running horizontally across his cheeks. In the confinement of his flashy European clothes the animal energy of his body seemed ill at ease.

"I must know exactly where Middleton is from this moment until he dies," Harringam said, enunciating each word with deliberation. "Watch him. Do not kill him unless he attempts to enter a police station or post a letter. If he does either, kill him immediately. He may use the telephone. I can see no way of preventing that, so we will not use the office until I am sure the coast is clear. If you want me, send a message via the Edgware number." He paused. Jenkins grinned and nodded. It was a hunt. He enjoyed hunting.

Harringam turned to the other occupant of the room, a huge, baby-faced man with rings on his hot, fat hands. "Well?"

The man called Deacon snickered. It was a terrible sound but it had no effect on Harringam. "Got to be psychological, mister," Deacon explained. "Got to trap something 'e uses every day of 'is life. Bathroom mirror, f'r example—or the gas-cooker. I fancy the latter meself; cast iron shatters a treat. Carve 'im in bits, it would."

"He must die instantly," Harringam reminded him. "If he should live to whisper ten words to a policeman it would be as bad as if he were not killed at all."

Deacon's hands waved in the air, rings glittering, nails polished and manicured. It was a gesture of complete and horrible assurance. Death was Mr. Deacon's profession, his hobby, and his delight.

The interview with Harringam had left David Middleton pleasantly excited. He laughed to himself at the memory of it, astonished by the ease with which he had tricked Harringam into confessing that he was an agent. Even now, he realized, Harringam would be in an agony of uncertainty about how much he knew. The answer, with splendid irony, was nothing. He had no evidence, no proof—only a suspicion, an inward taste of wrong-doing, which had turned out to be based upon fact.

What was he to do with his knowledge, now that it was confirmed? Go to the police? Tell them that the respectable Mr. Victor Harringam was a master-spy and then assure them that the reason he knew was that Harringam had said so—that and no

more? It was ludicrous. Furthermore, to go to the police would mean compromising himself. Yet Harringam's activities had to be stopped; he would have to think of some way of reporting the whole thing anonymously and yet with authority enough to persuade the police to act. For the moment he had no idea how.

It was after midday. Hunger prompted David and he left his flat, taking the lift to the ground floor and leaving the building by the Kensington Road exit. He had turned to the right to go towards Knightsbridge when he saw a man sitting on a bench in the park. He frowned as he recognized Jenkins. He walked on for fifty yards in the direction of the Hyde Park Hotel and then glanced over his shoulder. The negro was following. David frowned again, then shrugged. Let him follow. This was London's West End and broad daylight—nothing to be afraid of.

David ate his lunch quietly in the Hyde Park Hotel buttery. Then, having paid his bill, he walked out into the sunshine. Jenkins was lounging on the far side of the street, deeply interested in a show-window display. David felt anger rising. If they thought they could keep a tail on him they were mistaken!

A taxi cruised towards him. He held up his hand and jumped in. "Tottenham Court Road." The driver nodded. Through the taxi window David watched a large car emerge from the turning leading to Lowndes Square. It halted briefly and Jenkins was lithe and swift as he slid into the car.

David turned back to the taxi-driver. "Go as fast as you can," he said through the partition. "My wife's put a detective on to me and I want to lose the perisher."

The cabby grinned. "Do me best, guv."

The taxi, a new one, accelerated. So did the car behind. David lit a cigarette. He told himself to be careful. Harringam was up to something. Not a man to be underestimated. The cigarette smoke soothed him. He relaxed. So what? He thought of those years in the R.A.F. What was Harringam, by comparison with a large part of the German Air Force? What, indeed!

Looking like a prosperous plumber, with a tool bag in one fat hand, Deacon let himself into David Middleton's flat as if he owned the place. He was humming under his breath. He went straight to the bathroom. There was a mirror above the wash-basin and a light above the mirror, but the switch was outside the door. Deacon shook his head.

He moved ponderously along the corridor to the kitchen, his small eyes alive to everything that he passed. In the tiny kitchen he went straight to the gas-stove. He lifted some of the fittings of the burners—cast iron, because the stove was an old one. Deacon chuckled. Just the job—star-shaped cast-iron rings, loosely fitting over the burners. Fly through the air with the greatest of ease, they would. He snickered again, his immense jowls quivering with delight. The fat, beringed hands pulled out twelve four-ounce cartridges of plastic explosive from the tool bag and started to unwrap them.

As Deacon kneaded the deadly stuff into malleability he amused himself by modelling grotesque little heads—gargoyles, devils, monstrosities. He liked to think of himself as an artist . . .

David paid off his taxi outside a cinema in Tottenham Court Road. Then he walked swiftly into a bar beside the cinema and out again through a second entrance in Great Russell Street. He half walked, half ran until he was level with the British Museum where he found another taxi which he took to Aldwych. He paid off the driver and dived westwards into the maze of small streets near Covent Garden. Eventually, after turning and twisting for a quarter of an hour, he turned south, crossed the Strand, and walked straight into a news-theatre.

Fast walking had made him breathless and he relaxed gratefully in the darkness. The chase had put a feeling of urgency into him and he admitted to himself that if Harringam meant business, which he evidently did, it would be better to disappear for a while. There was certainly no point in making a sitting duck of himself by staying in London. However, his money, his passport,

and his pistol were back at his flat—which would surely be watched—and how to pick them up presented a problem. He needed to get out of England; if possible, in the old cargo plane that was his livelihood—but this was something that could not be done without money and a passport.

For a long time David stared blindly at the screen in front of him, seeing nothing of the news-reel and thinking hard. The more he thought the more certain it became that there was no way to avoid returning to his flat. Intuition told him that it was the last thing he ought to risk. But since it had to be done, he decided to waste no time. His flat was in a busy block, after all, with a porter on duty night and day.

He stood up and started to move. Something prompted him to turn his head to glance down the line of faces in the row behind. There were three white faces and then . . . then there was what seemed to be a man without a head!

David's breath stopped and his heart faltered. The headless man was Jenkins—too black to be seen in the obscurity. How, David asked himself, how, after all his cunning counter-moves and evasions, could Jenkins possibly have tracked him down? It was beyond logic. He remembered that Jenkins had been born in West Africa, in the jungle, and he shivered.

A gleam of white shone in the blackness—beautiful, smiling white teeth set in a head that had a savage nobility. A soft, lilting African voice, seeming to come from nowhere, reached David's ears.

"Go home, dead man," it said. "Go home."

David slipped out into the Strand. It was four o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was still hot and perspiration lay in beads on his forehead. He fought the temptation to glance over his shoulder. The episode in the cinema had ravaged his confidence. He knew Jenkins. He had often chatted with him. A hired thug would not have been so menacing—Jenkins was intelligent and worked for Harringam out of loyalty and conviction. Fear gripped him now; before, he had been aware only of a vague uneasiness. Must lose Jenkins, he told himself. Got to lose Jenkins. Then go back to the flat—quickly in and quickly out again, and away, a long way away.

He dodged through thick traffic to a taxi. "Hampstead, driver." In the taxi, holding his breath and staring out of the rear window, he waited. The black car appeared. He swore bitterly under his breath. For the first time, David found himself wondering: was he going to die for his bravado in challenging Harringam?

The lights changed and the taxi crawled forward into Trafalgar Square. The traffic was thick, moving glutinously. David wanted to lean forward and blare the horn. He wanted to shout, Get out of the way, you fools! Get out of the way, for pity's sake!

"Faster," he said to the driver. "For heaven's sake get a move on!"

The sun had gone down and the light was failing when David's taxi drew up outside the block of flats in Kensington Road. He thrust money into the driver's hand and raced across the pavement. As he ran he half expected to feel a bullet tear into his back. Why else was Jenkins following him, if not to execute him?

He had driven all the way to Hampstead, persuading his driver to twist and turn like a demented rabbit on the way. He had left that cab in Hampstead and dived into the Underground—out of the Underground at Warren Street and along to Baker Street on a bus—then a long, tortuous walk to Marble Arch and, finally, this last taxi home.

All the time he had been unable to shake off the feeling that his desperate evasions were futile. Jenkins worked by instinct. By all logical standards he must have lost the man, yet had he? Doubt tortured him. He found himself thinking of the negro as Nemesis—the personification of doom—relentless, tireless, pitiless.

David left the lift on the third floor of the block and paused to take breath. Jenkins's words in the cinema sounded again in his ears, *Go home, dead man.* Had it been an injunction—a command—a piece of witchcraft, even? Would he open his front door only to run into the blast of a pistol, or the flash of a long knife? Had he been herded like a sheep to his death by that black panther of a man?

No matter. He had to go in. He wanted his passport, his money, and his gun—above all, his gun! That would even things up a bit. He ached to feel the comfort of its butt in his hand.

With his breath held and his ears straining, he eased his latch-key into the lock of his front door. Silence. He turned the key slowly; then, suddenly, he thrust open the door and flung himself over the threshold, crouching, presenting the smallest possible target for the shortest possible time against the light in the corridor. No pistol cracked, no knife blade slashed through the darkness. Nothing. He slammed the door behind him. With a sweep of his arm he knocked down the light switch. He pushed home the door's two stout bolts and thumbed down the latch on the lock. And for an instant he felt gloriously, beautifully safe . . .

Walking like a boxer, on balance, and as alert as a prowling alley cat, David approached the door of his bedroom. Kicked it open. Switched on the light. Empty.

He ran across the room and jerked open a drawer, plunging his hand among the ties that filled it, groping for the cool comfort of his automatic pistol. It was not there. He scrabbled among the ties. It was not there. It had gone. His gun had gone.

Heavily, David crossed the bedroom to the desk by the window. He opened it and then opened one of the drawers inside. No passport. No money. He swung round so that he was facing the door and for a moment had to work hard to control the impulse to yell. Beside the door there was a heavy brass doorstop. He picked it up, holding it like a club in his right hand. He went out into the hall again and kicked open the door of the sitting-room viciously. And the bathroom. And the kitchen. Then the cupboard where he kept his clothes. Then the balcony outside the sitting-room. Nobody. No sign of any disturbance. But they had been there; they had been to collect his passport and his money—and his gun. Damn them!

He made a round of the windows, shutting them and slipping the catches.

With the flat sealed against intrusion—as far as it could be sealed—David sat down on a chair in the hall. Danger still obsessed him. His skin was crawling. All right, he told himself, they've been in the flat. But they're not here now! He repeated this to himself several times. He was safe, he realized, at least until morning—at least until he went out again, to face Jenkins.

Presently he got up and, controlling the fear in him, pressing it down and dominating it, walked into the kitchen. The idea of coffee had tempted him—black coffee to keep him awake. He glanced at the battered coffee percolator on the gas-cooker . . .

Samuel Deacon made a huge grey blur on the park seat. He was prepared to wait all night. There was little fun in setting a booby trap if you didn't stay to watch it blow—might as well play a practical joke and run away before you'd cashed in on the laugh. He settled himself comfortably and broke off a piece of nut-milk chocolate from the half-pound slab in his coat pocket.

Jenkins appeared, almost invisible in the dusk, noiselessly. He was in a bad temper. He had lost his man between Baker Street and Marble Arch and his pride was injured.

Deacon looked up, cheeks bulging with nut-milk chocolate. "Lost 'im, did you? Don't fret, matey; he's inside. Any minute now . . ."

David stirred restlessly. Penetrating his sour dreams, a sense of peril prodded him out of sleep. He sat up with a jerk. His chair was set with its back to the wall. Sitting in it he had been able to watch the front door and the doors of all the other rooms

in the flat as well. His hands were sticky with sweat. He rubbed them together, trying to wipe the sweat away and not succeeding. He had not meant to fall asleep. The whisky he had drunk was to blame. Ought to have had black coffee instead.

His eyes were hot and sore and his bones ached. Even though he had slept for several hours he was not rested. Wearily he got to his feet and went to the bathroom, treading silently as if there were danger in the sound of his own footsteps. The light above the mirror clicked on and he stared at his reflection. Eyes bleary, tongue coated, stubble black and sordid on his chin.

He mocked himself. "Squadron-Leader David Middleton, D.S.O., twelve German aircraft shot down and confirmed. Those were the days, chum. Then you were a hero. Now . . . now what are you? Windy! Cringing. You're so frightened of that black animal you'd be on your knees to him—now—if you thought it'd help. Fool! You're enough to make a cat sick . . ."

He faced the fact that fear had grown during the night. It had been bad. Now it was worse. There was death in the air—in the flat. He could see it in his eyes—the knowledge of it. He ran water into the basin and plunged his face into it. Dripping, with his soiled shirt gaping open to the waist, he walked unsteadily into the kitchen.

He wanted coffee. He wanted strong, sweet, black coffee and aspirin to dull the ache that was splitting his brow and hammering at his temples. He took the percolator off the stove and filled it with water. He spooned coffee into it lavishly, spilling quantities onto the chipped enamel table-top. Greasy dishes leered at him from the sink, legacies of a party he had thrown two days earlier.

Matches . . . where were the lousy matches? He went to the cupboard and took a new box from a packet. His fingers were clumsy. He thumbed the end of the box too hard. Matches fell in a ragged cascade over the burners. David cursed miserably. He thrust his arm under the grill and scraped the matches together. Then he stooped, looking for the ones that had evaded his scrabbling fingers.

He noticed that the underpart of the top of the cooker was packed with yellow putty. Who the hell's been putting putty under there, he wondered dully. His brain cleared. A lightning flash of percipience made his eyes widen and he recoiled, leaping away from the deadly yellow stuff.

There was a torch on the mantelpiece. He took it and returned to the cooker.

Its light enabled him to see the gun-cotton primer, almost buried in the yellow explosive, with a detonator protruding from its centre. He traced the thin white wires leading away from

the detonator to an electric battery strapped to the body of the cooker, and found the two softly gleaming copper contacts poised behind the tap connecting the main burner.

He knew enough about explosives to understand the diabolical effectiveness of the trap. Anyone within feet, or even yards, of that mass of cast iron packed with explosive would not have stood a chance of escape; iron fragments would have torn his body to shreds and the blast would have hurled the remnants with killing force against the wall of the kitchen behind.

David straightened. The light of understanding played upon the fear in him and made it evaporate. He knew now what he had been afraid of. To replace fear came overwhelming indignation and a cold appreciation of Harringam's deadliness. What a fool he had been! There was a razor's edge between bravery and stupidity; and only sheer luck had preserved him. He came to a new decision without hesitation, and walked into the sitting-room to pick up the telephone.

It took him only a moment to get through to the Scotland Yard emergency service. He told his story, diffidently at first, but with greater confidence when the voice at the other end of the line showed a lively interest and none of the scepticism he had been expecting. When he put down the receiver after ten minutes of urgent conversation he was smiling.

David returned to the kitchen and took from a drawer a ball of string, which he bowled down the corridor towards the front door, keeping a hold on the loose end. He tied the end of the string to the lethal gas-tap—gently, holding his breath, his fingers shaking a little. He carried the string round the back of a chair for the sake of leverage. Satisfied that a pull on the string would open the tap and bring the two deadly contacts together, he retreated down the corridor . . .

The explosion broke the early-morning stillness like a clap of unexpected thunder, and the windows of David's sitting-room, directly across the hall from the kitchen, spewed broken glass and curtains outwards. The curtains, tattered but still attached to their rods, waved forlornly like ragged banners of distress.

In the park, Deacon stood and stared up at the window, his dimpled hands clasped together with delight, like those of a child at a pantomime.

"There," he said. "Told you it'd work. Couldn't miss. Pretty, eh? One o' the prettiest jobs I ever did."

Jenkins, too, was staring up at the window. Presently Deacon tugged at his sleeve. "Time to go," he said. "Time to go, mister. Police'll be around like flies in a fish-and-chip shop before we know where we are."

"Wait, fat man." It was a command.

They waited. They watched windows go up and a small crowd gather from nowhere. They saw the police car arrive and the ambulance. They waited until the ambulance men emerged from the block carrying a stretcher with a shapeless mound on it, mercifully hidden in red hospital blankets. They heard comments in the crowd, "Gas explosion. Some poor devil copped it."

Then at last Jenkins let Deacon go. The fat man hurried away nervously.

Jenkins took his time, walking towards Knightsbridge until he saw a telephone box. He rang an Edgware number and when his call was answered he said one word into the mouthpiece, "Middleton." He was asked a question and his white teeth shone as he replied, "Little pieces, boss—done saw 'em under a blanket."

Five days had elapsed since the explosion in David Middleton's flat. In the evening of each day Jenkins rang the Edgware number, and on each occasion his report was negative. "Nothing, boss."

"No visitors?"

"Two today—but they was makin' ordinary inquiries accordin' to Miss Allen."

The next question startled Jenkins, coming from the emotionless Harringam. "Does the place feel right?"

"Feel right, boss? I reckon so."

"It doesn't make you feel uncomfortable to watch it? You have no feelings that anything is the matter?"

Jenkins thought for a moment. "I ain't had no feelings," he said. "I reckon it's O.K. What are you worrying about? The boy's dead, ain't he? The papers said so."

"Yes, of course," Harringam answered. "You're right. There's a risk, but then there's always a risk. It must be taken. Good night."

On the sixth day, Harringam returned to his office. He emerged from Earls Court station, as drab as ever. At the top of the street in which his office was situated he paused. Two women with shopping-bags were walking towards him. A taxi put down a passenger at a house nearby. A dog was padding along in the middle of the road, asking for quick extinction if a car were to come out of a side street. A look of resignation came over Harringam's face—a mere change in the expression of the eyes. He started to walk again, slowly and deliberately, towards his office.

In the outer room his secretary was typing a letter. She looked

up as he entered and fear stared out of her eyes. Harringam raised his eyebrows at her. She was afraid of him, he knew, but was there something else that was worrying her? He heard a slight noise behind him.

Harringam swung round.

A man in a grey suit was facing him.

David Middleton walked out of the inner office. Miss Allen, the secretary, screamed.

It was David who acted as Harringam's hand tore a button from his cuff and moved towards his mouth. David leapt forward, caught the hand, and twisted. He was not gentle. Harringam gasped with pain, and the button fell to the floor.

The tall man in grey watched, smiling.

"Perhaps you had better forget the buccaneering and come and work for us, Middleton," he said. "You move as quickly as you think."

David grinned at him. "Sometimes," he said. "Not always, though, thank heaven."

★ ★ ★

IN A NUTSHELL

"He who would eat the nut must first crack the shell," says the proverb, but we are sure that our autumnal questions will be dead nuts to the intelligent reader, so get cracking!
Answers on page 109.

1. *Which regiment was called the Nutcrackers?*
2. *Where is the Nutmeg State?*
3. *"A woman, a dog, and a —— tree*
   The more you beat them, the better they be!"
   The tree? (Even if you disagree.) And where did it come from?
4. *As well as being a stocky horse and a male swan, a cob is what kind of nut?*
5. *Where did the use of the word chestnut, meaning a stale joke, originate?*
6. *Can you identify: i. a monkey puzzle;*
   ii. a monkey's allowance
7. *What is a philippina? What must you do if you discover one?*
8. *St. Philibert, of course, is the patron saint of filbert-nuts. When is his day?*
9. *From what nuts are the following made: marzipan, parsipan, praline?*

An' they talks a lot of lovin'
but wot do they understand?

RUDYARD KIPLING

I will tell you what it is, Ernest, or rather I *cannot* tell you what it is, that is so *dangerously* attractive in you. I very often ask myself questions upon the subject but never can I answer them. I say "is it personal beauty—is it his manner—his conversation—his sentiments?" No, all these of course *help*, but still the *danger* does not lie in *any* of these; but in a sort of *nameless indescribable something*, that winds *round & round* one, as silk round a silkworm and entangles, irretrievably entangles one, before one is aware where one is . . .

HARRIET CAPEL, *Letter to Baron Trip, March 1815*

Je ne Sais Quoi

Something there is moves me to love, and I
Do know I love, but know not how, nor why.

ALEXANDER BROME, *1620-1666*

Proper Approach

Proper lovin's something that should sneak up on a woman, gradual-like.

ELLIOT PAUL, *Desperate Scenery*

Definition

What thing is love? For well I wot love is a thing:
It is a prick, it is a sting,
It is a pretty, pretty thing,
It is a fire, it is a coal
Whose flame creeps in at every hole.

GEORGE PEELE,
The Hunting of Cupid

SPIDER ORCHID

This was the test he had meant to make
—only far more drastic

BY WYATT BLASSINGAME

THERE were four of them in the boat. Dr. Walters sat in the bows. Behind him was his daughter, then Garry Howell, then McAmes, the guide, at the outboard motor. Over the noise of the motor there was little talking, but when Dr. Walters glanced back he saw Howell laughing and leaning forward to say something in Louise's ear. The doctor frowned, but turned his attention once more to the swamp.

The Okefenokee Swamp, on the Georgia-Florida border, was like no other place in the world. Each day when they turned out of the main channel into the swamp, it was like gliding across a looking-glass and then, somehow, slipping through it and into another world.

He had been here every day for two weeks now, but the country remained amorphous and strange as when he first saw it. The water was blue-black, like ink, until you scooped it up and saw it was perfectly clear, actually without colour. On its mirror-like surface the great cypresses grew upside-down, with the sky above and below them. From a mud bank an alligator slipped into the water, huge and hideous.

It was fascinating, Dr. Walters thought, and horrible. A man didn't need to strain his imagination to believe that here nature lay in ambush, that underneath this beauty there was always an impending, personal savagery of water and bottomless mud, insects and reptiles.

Dr. Walters smiled dryly. He was not ordinarily so fanciful, but it was his daughter who had started him thinking along these lines. " It's terrible! " Louise had said last night. The four of them were sitting round the camp-fire at the swamp's edge.

" Terrible? " Dr. Walters asked. " What's terrible, Louise? "

She had turned on her stool to stare into the darkness. " Out there," she said. " The swamp. I can't get used to it."

Garry Howell laughed. " Who'd want to get used to it? "

" I suppose it's silly," Louise said, ".but I—I keep thinking about someone being lost out there, alone." She turned back to

the fire and to McAmes, the guide. " What would a person do if he got lost on one of those little islands without a boat? "

" I guess he'd stay there."

" At least, he wouldn't starve," Howell said. " Not if snake meat is as good as they say." He stood up, a slender, graceful man who looked younger than he was, his face smooth and pleasant, as though it had never been touched by pain or even hardship. " Come on, darling," he said to Louise. " I'll let you walk down to the landing-stage with me and watch the moon come up."

" Why, thank you," she said, smiling at him, the slow, growing smile which Dr. Walters had always found so appealing, though he felt a slight pain now, watching her look that way at Howell. Then she took Howell's hand and they went off.

After a moment McAmes said, " Are they engaged, Doctor? "

" No." He realized after he spoke that his voice had been too loud, too sharp. " At least, not formally. Why? "

" I just wondered." McAmes was looking off into the darkness. " Is she in love with him? "

Dr. Walters could not answer with certainty. " She thinks she is, or did before we came down here. I—" He raised his eyes to McAmes's face and there was something close to pleading in them. " You're about his age. What do you think of Garry? "

" He seems all right. He's pretty well-to-do, isn't he? "

" He's always had money. Too much money," Dr. Walters said. " For him, botany's just a pastime. He'll drop it when he's tired of it. As he'd drop—" But he checked himself in time.

" He told me you weren't too pleased at having him wished on you as an assistant," McAmes said. " Still, he seems to know about orchids."

" He's intelligent enough."

But that was not it, the doctor thought. A man doesn't have to be brilliant, but he's got to be honest. *Honest* . . . meaning it to apply not to words alone, but to all the actions of a man's life, the things that make him what he is. And he was not sure of Garry Howell. He was too much of a dilettante, at science, at art —at women. And suddenly there flashed through Dr. Walters's mind the picture of his daughter smiling that slow, deep smile at Howell.

I don't want her to be hurt, he thought. I don't want her hurt! And he told himself again this was the reason he had talked her into postponing the marriage: to give her, to give himself, a chance to be sure. This was the reason he had brought Louise on this trip with Howell, because when you live closely, sharing discomforts, the basic flaws of human nature are apt to show through.

Across the fire McAmes was saying, " Louise is a pretty good botanist herself, isn't she? " His face was weather-roughened, but the features were well shaped and sensitive.

" She's first-rate," Walters said. " But then I suppose it's natural. Her mother died when she was five, and I've brought her up in the field and the laboratory. Perhaps I've overdone it—" But he had wanted to keep her close to him, he thought. Because his daughter and his work were all he really cared for.

" She's been teaching me a little about orchids," McAmes said. " Showing me some pictures. That's where I got the idea I had seen some—" he paused to get the strange-sounding name right —" *Cypripedium Arachnis*."

" I doubt it," Walters said. " But it's possible. We'll see tomorrow."

He stood up and went to the trailer that formed the base camp of the expedition. He undressed and went to bed. He lay on his back, not even conscious that he was waiting, listening to all the lost, lonely, throbbing noises of the swamp, until the trailer door opened and he knew Louise had come in. But no light went on beyond the door at her end of the trailer. He could hear her moving about for a while, undressing.

Dr. Walters was almost asleep when he heard the choked sound of her crying. He got out of bed, moving quickly through the darkness to the door that separated them. " Louise . . ."

" Yes? "

He opened the door. She was in bed, and he stooped and put a hand on her shoulder. She lay face down and he could see only the pale blur of her hair on the pillow.

" It's all right," she said after a moment, her voice still a little choked. " I'm just being stupid."

" Is it Garry? "

" It's nothing, Dad."

As he stood there a moment longer, yearning to help her, he felt towards Garry Howell a blind and baffled emotion. Then he turned and went back to his own bed.

That had been last night. Now Dr. Walters sat in the bows of the boat with the others behind him, moving deeper into the swamp. Automatically he noted the orchids they passed, but the core of his mind was still on Louise.

He knew he could not live her life for her, and he had always known the time would come when he must lose her. He had watched her adolescent puppy-love affairs without anguish, but with Garry Howell, though, it was different. The man was too mercurial. Spoilt, the doctor thought. The born philanderer

was basically juvenile, basically selfish. Marriage would not change him. And Louise, quiet Louise, was too loyal and intense to see it.

Behind him the motor sputtered and stopped. The boat slowed, the sound of water against the bow seeming loud in the sudden quiet. Dr. Walters looked back, to see McAmes lifting a two-gallon tin from the deck.

"Fuel," McAmes said.

"Where are we now?"

"In the middle of the swamp, I should think. About as far north as you have been."

"There are some more orchids about two hundred yards back," Walters said. He was looking at Howell now. "Did you see them?"

"Yes. We've already found some of them south of here."

"Oh." The doctor was annoyed, and a little ashamed of his annoyance, his petty anger. But how could Howell have been looking for orchids and laughing with Louise at the same time?

The boat was drifting now, without sound. It seemed to float on the surface of the water, like a toy on a glass-topped table.

"We keep moving," Louise said. "You can't see the water move, but the boat keeps drifting."

"Most of the water in the swamp is moving," McAmes said. He was replacing the cap on the tin, working with the deliberation that marked all his movements. "Some of the old-timers say that if you're really lost, the best chance of finding your way out is just to keep going with the current, and after a while you'll come out in the Suwannee."

"No doubt," Howell said. "But after how long? A couple of weeks?"

"It might take a pretty long time." But McAmes was looking at the girl, not at Howell, as though waiting for her to speak again. When she didn't, he turned and pulled the starter cord on the outboard.

They moved on, the watery trail burrowing deeper into the swamp. Sometimes limbs overhung the way so that they looked to Dr. Walters like a solid wall. At times the fragile leaves of the cypress shut out the sky, and the sunlight sifted through in a pale green twilight. On a half-sunken log a water moccasin lay coiled, not lifting its head as they went past.

Dr. Walters looked back at Howell, knowing the young man would be watching the snake, all the muscles of his face and body drawn with fear. But when he saw Dr. Walters watching him, Howell grinned and shouted some joke which the doctor could not understand, and didn't want to.

A hypocrite, Walters thought. Many men were afraid of snakes, but Howell went to great lengths to hide his fear. Like that poor joke last night about eating snake meat. He'd choke if he had to touch a snake, much less eat one.

A few minutes later McAmes cut the motor, and the boat nosed ashore on an island where the earth rose higher than usual out of the water.

"Here we are," he said. "At least, this is where I saw something that looked like the picture Louise showed me."

Dr. Walters stepped ashore, feeling a curious quiver of the earth, as though it were only slightly firmer than jelly. The others followed him, McAmes bringing the anchor. "Come on, Doctor. The orchids were a little way in."

"You two go on," Howell said. "Louise and I will see what we can find around here."

Dr. Walters started to protest, but he saw the way Louise was looking at him and he stopped. "All right," he said. "Only, be careful, darling," and knew it sounded silly even as he spoke. She wasn't a child any more. But he couldn't stop the old, paternal phrase slipping out.

She smiled at him. "You be careful. You're the one who gets so interested in plants you forget to look where you're going."

"All right," he said, and followed McAmes into the underbrush. Away from the water the heat took on a baleful, personal quality. It brought the sweat oozing from Dr. Walters's body. "I can't believe it's the *Cypripedium Arachnis*," he said. "It's never been found in this region."

"So Louise told me," McAmes said. Then, "How many kinds of orchids are there, Doctor?"

"Approximately fifteen thousand." He liked to talk about his work and McAmes was a good listener, quick to learn. Following him through the underbrush, with the gnats and mosquitoes beginning to swarm around his face, Dr. Walters talked about orchids. There were northern and southern species, and it was only in certain regions that the range of species overlapped. That was why the Waterfellow Botanical Gardens had sent them here: to determine just which northern and southern species grew side by side.

"I've studied orchids for years," Dr. Walters said, "but I've never heard of the *Arachnis* growing here."

"These last two weeks have been an experience for me," said McAmes. He spoke slowly, moving ahead of the doctor through the shadows, the dank heat. "I was born and brought up in these parts, and I've seen these flowers all my life. But I never paid any attention to them. An orchid was a big purple

thing you sent to a girl, if you had money. And botany—the part of it I was interested in—was how to grow better corn."

Walters smiled, liking McAmes, his seriousness and dependability. If only Howell were more like . . .

Ahead of him McAmes was saying, "There are your orchids, Doctor."

"Where?" Then he saw them.

The ground sloped down and turned to marsh again. Along its edge the orchids grew, leafy green stalks holding the massed spiderlike blossoms a foot or two above the ground.

"Watch out for snakes!" McAmes said. But the doctor was going forward quicky now, his glasses off, wiping the mist from them. Then he was standing at the edge of the flowers, his glasses on again, and he knew even before he picked one.

"This is not the *Cypripedium Arachnis*," he said. He was not too disappointed; he had never let himself believe it could be. "The *Arachnis* has more odour," he said. "It's extremely fragrant. And the spurs are longer."

McAmes looked disappointed. "I'm sorry, Doctor. I didn't mean to take you on a wild-goose chase."

"It isn't a goose chase. It's as important to know the orchid isn't here as to know it is. To be sure of the truth is what matters."

They turned back across the island, McAmes in the lead. "How do you find your way about?" the doctor asked. "I'm lost on this island. And if I had to find my way out of the swamp . . ."

"You come to know it in time. Though I think a sense of direction is more instinct than reason. Like a homing pigeon."

"I'm glad I've got you along as pigeon," Walters said. Then, after another five minutes' walking, they came across water that blocked the way, and he said, "Where are we? This looks like—"

"The boat's gone!" McAmes said. He pointed to where the marks of the boat still showed on the mud bank. "I expect the others are using it to look around, but they can't be far off. They didn't use the motor or I'd have heard it."

"Of course." Louise was probably within a hundred yards or so. He called, "Louise! Louise, where are you?"

She answered immediately, from somewhere off to his right.

"That's funny," McAmes said. "Sounds as if she's on land."

"You mean—"

McAmes did not answer. He had turned his head to one side, listening. Then the doctor, too, could hear the sounds in the underbrush, and a moment later Garry Howell came in sight, walking, with Louise behind him. They were not talking and it

occurred to the doctor that both looked angry, their faces taut and strained.

Then Louise forced a smile. " Think we were lost, Dad? "

McAmes broke in: " Where's the boat? "

" Right there," Howell said. " What—" He stopped, looking at the place where the boat had been. " I left it right there. After you and the doctor left, Louise and I took it to look around a bit. But I put it back right there." His gaze swung from McAmes to Walters. " What's the joke? "

" Did you put out the anchor? " McAmes said.

" The anchor? " Suddenly Howell's tongue moved along his lips as though they were dry. " I don't remember. I—"

McAmes turned from him, looking out into the dim reaches of the swamp. " It must've drifted off with the current."

Howell looked from McAmes to the bank, where the marks of the boat showed in the mud. " Louise and I were . . . I must have forgotten . . ."

" It may have drifted aground past this next turn," McAmes said. " Wait here, all of you."

They watched until he was out of sight. " Suppose it didn't go aground? " Louise said. " Suppose he can't find it? "

" Then we'll have to stay here until someone finds us," Dr. Walters said.

" That," Howell said, " may be quite a time."

The full gravity of the situation dawned suddenly, terribly on the doctor. Days, a week or more might pass before anyone even knew they were missing. And by then . . . Few men had ever penetrated this far into the heart of the Okefenokee. It might be weeks before they were found. And they had no supplies. Not even a gun to shoot game, or fishing tackle; even the snake-bite kit was on board. How long could a man live there without food, without shelter?

He saw Louise watching him. " It's all right," he said, saying it as though she were still a child, awakening frightened in the night. " It'll be all right." Then his voice cracked, and he turned violently on Howell: " You got her into this with your carelessness! "

" Dad! " the girl cried. " Dad, please! "

Still breathing heavily, her father was glaring at Howell. " How are you going to get out of this, Garry? Maybe this is something you can't drop and walk away from when you grow tired of it."

" I know. It's what you've been wanting all along, what you've been waiting for. Only a little more drastic."

" What do you mean? " Walters said.

"This is why you wanted Louise on the trip—waiting for me to do something to show I was just a rich man's son with no courage or honour," Howell answered him. "That's why you persuaded her to postpone our wedding."

"I didn't want her to marry you until she was sure—"

"Sure? Of what?"

"That she loved you. That you were worth marrying. There was no hurry."

"I wanted to get married then," Howell said angrily. "Louise did, too. But she didn't want to hurt you, because you are her father."

"Stop it, Garry!" the girl said.

But he did not look at her. "You don't have to persuade her any more, Doctor," he said. "You've won. That's what we were talking about last night, and today in the boat. I wanted her to tell you that we were going to be married. Soon as we get back. She wanted to wait until you weren't so opposed to it. But you'll always be opposed to any choice Louise makes without you—"

"That isn't true!"

"And how about McAmes?" Howell stormed on. "He's in love with her, or would be if he thought there was a chance."

"McAmes?"

"You haven't noticed? His interest in botany. The way he looks at her. And he's no rich man's son. He's serious enough. Would you want her to marry him?"

"Garry!" the girl said. "For heaven's sake . . ."

"That's what we were talking about when we got out of the boat," Howell said. "I said you would never find any man you thought was good enough for Louise. And she got angry." His laugh had no humour in it. "I got angry and forgot the anchor. I suppose that proves you were right about me all along."

Walters was not thinking about the anchor any longer, but about what Howell had said: McAmes in love with Louise. He liked McAmes, trusted him, but would he want Louise to marry him? "You'll never find any man good enough for Louise," Howell had said.

But he was her father; he was responsible for her. Anyway, if she were determined, if she really loved Howell, then nothing he, her father, could do would change her mind. Even though she would not want to hurt him, she would not want to be forced to choose between him and a husband . . .

He turned away, walking blindly along the water's edge, trying to clear the confusion in his mind. Because he knew how near the truth Howell had come.

Yet was it right to refuse all responsibility, to say, " Go ahead, marry this man because you love him, because you think you love him," believing all the while she would be hurt? Where did the line lie between meddling interference and the true duty of a parent?

From the corner of his eye he saw some orchids growing just back from the water's edge, and he turned towards them instinctively, stooping to pick one.

Then, with his fingers on the stalk of the orchid, he saw the snake. A moccasin, thick-bodied, hideous!

Walters had reached directly over it for the flower; now its head was raised, drawn back, scarcely a foot from his forearm.

It seemed to Dr. Walters that he squatted there, motionless, while his body turned into ice and thawed again. His face was so close to that of the snake he could see the thin vertical slit of the eye pupil, the shallow pit between the snake's eye and nostril. It was watching his hand, not his face, and he knew that when he moved, it would strike.

He thought of the snakebite kit in the boat; he thought of being lost here in the swamp, without help. Once he had seen a man bitten by a snake; they had saved that man's life by giving him antivenene within the hour. Even then . . .

From somewhere far off he heard his daughter's voice, then Howell's. He heard Louise say his name and other words that could not register in his mind. Then he heard the scream.

He saw Louise and Howell staring at him and at the snake. He saw Louise start to run towards him, and Howell holding her back.

" Throw something! " she whispered. " Throw—"

" No! That would make it strike! "

He saw Howell stand for what seemed hours, not moving. Dr. Walters would have called to him, shouted for help, but the muscles of his throat had shrivelled.

Then Howell was speaking and somehow Walters understood the words: " Keep still, Doctor. Just keep still a little longer."

He saw Howell move sideways out of his vision. His gaze jerked back to the snake. Its head was raised a little higher now, perhaps twelve inches to the right and two inches below his forearm. It waited, sure of itself, watching the white thing on the flower's stalk.

Watching the snake, he didn't see Howell until the last moment; the vision of the two was blurred: Howell was within two feet of the snake, behind it, squatting, just as Walters was.

The tableau broke. Dr. Walters was erect, staggering For a moment the world seemed to waver. He saw Howell holding the

snake by the back of its head, and the snake's body lashing about.

Howell threw it. It struck the water, and ripples leapt out in every direction, diamond-lit by the sun, and the snake disappeared in the running ripples.

Howell came back from the water's edge. He stood quite straight, looking from Dr. Walters to Louise. Then his knees gave way and he fell to the ground. Violent shudders ran through him.

The snake's fangs had not touched him. It was only the aftermath of fear, and slowly Dr. Walters recognized it.

"Didn't strike . . ." Howell said. "I always had a phobia about snakes. I tried . . ." The shuddering checked his words.

Watching him, watching Louise cling to him, Dr. Walters felt something more than fear going out of himself. It was nothing he could put into words. Not yet. Though even now, in a state of near shock, he felt a strange relief, a feeling of happiness at having been in the wrong.

He had never met a man like Howell, nor had he made any effort to know or understand him. What Howell had done was an act of selflessness, of self-sacrifice, even though he had come through it unharmed. It was an act of spiritual and moral courage in the face of a deadly fear. And he knew that a man capable of that type of courage was not one who would falter under any responsibility he might assume, neither the responsibility of marriage nor any other.

He bent and put his hand on his daughter's shoulder. "It's going to be all right," he said. And he said, as he had to McAmes a lifetime ago, "To be sure of the truth is what matters."

She did not look up but he knew she understood, and he turned away, leaving them together. But before he had gone three steps he heard the outboard motor. It throbbed against the vast stillness of the swamp, growing steadily louder. A moment later the boat came into sight with McAmes sitting in the stern.

★ ★ ★

AUGUST COMPETITION

The two-guinea prize for spotting deliberate errors in our wildly inaccurate paragraph is divided between Mrs. E. Nelson, Lazy River, Norton, Southern Rhodesia, and Mrs. P. A. Annett, Baghdad, Iraq, who dead-heated in observing that: There's no such rank as Leiut. Constable; specially not spelt that way; it's a long walk from the Paris Gare du Nord to Florian's in Venice; Entente Cordiale is not an aperitif; snowdrops don't bloom in August; a Luger .49, if it existed, wouldn't fit an apron pocket.

A MERMAID TOO MANY

With a defiant flip of her tail
she leapt from his arms

BY JOAN AIKEN

IT was always the same when George came home at the end of a voyage. As soon as the *Katharina* dropped anchor by the quay and the news spread through the town, Janet left whatever she was doing—today she was bathing the cat in the dish-tub—and rushed to buy the ingredients for George's favourite supper of shrimp-and-watercress soup followed by chitterling pie. That done, and after seeing that the whole house was as clean as a pin, which it always was, she put on the dark-blue Indian silk, the earrings George had brought her from Venice, the Japanese slippers; then she strolled through a spray of the scent he'd found in Valparaiso, which was so potent that more than a dab of it brought all the males of the town howling round Janet's doorstep like timber-wolves. Then she settled down to wait for George.

After supper they always sat on the sofa for a little, in front of the fire, and then George would get fidgety and say, "Let's go to bed, shall we?" and Sam the cat would be shut up in the kitchen—much to his rage, for while George was at sea Sam slept on Janet's bed.

So it was this time. A gale was getting up, a dry gale; the little town rocked on its base, and the wind humping along the High Street made the cobbles heave, knocked the stars about in the sky, slammed windows and doors.

George swung up Harbour Lane with his duffel bag over his shoulder and Janet's present under the other arm. He was hungry, and happy to be home after months of water and salt wind; his sea-legs were still under him and the narrow, walled lane pushed him from side to side like a ninepin. Next trip he was to have command of the *Katharina*, and he was in a hurry to tell Janet about it.

"You murdering sod!" he shouted happily at a cyclist who shot past, brakeless, down the hairpin alley. He hitched his

heavy load to the left arm and went on up to Bell Cottage, pushing open the door with his knee.

"George!" Janet's arms were round him, and he noticed with pleasure the smoothness of the Indian silk, the scent of new-washed rush matting, Sam the cat sitting clean and furious by the fire, the weight and darkness of Janet's coiled hair, and the bowls ready on the table for shrimp-and-watercress soup.

"Lovely," he said, burying his nose and this time getting a tang of Valparaiso along with the shrimps and the matting.

After the first embrace they held away a little and scanned each other thirstily: Janet for any cuts or bruises that needed explaining or treatment, George to remind himself again of her beauty, which he had never forgotten, her beauty that held the warmth and darkness of wine.

Suddenly Janet's eyes fixed.

"What's that?"

"That's my present for you," said George proudly, and he lifted it, with a bit of an effort, onto the mantelpiece: an outsize bottle containing a fullsize mermaid. At least she was a three-foot mermaid, and that's as large as they need to come.

George tipped the bottle in lifting it, and the mermaid sank to the bottom, but she slowly righted herself, levelled, and undulated from stem to stern.

"Her name's Emma. Isn't she lovely? Only one in the country, I shouldn't wonder." And George smacked the mermaid encouragingly on her bottle. She rotated slowly, over and over, then brought her face close to the glass and gazed at them, unwinking.

There was a silence in the room and George, to fill it, said, "Pretty, isn't she?" again, and then, as the silence still went on, "How about the shrimp-and-watercress soup, Janet? I'm a hungry man, starving for your cooking, lass."

Janet nodded absently, went and came again with a bowlful of fragrant steam, and ladled the soup. It was plain her thoughts were elsewhere, and George had the unhappy feeling that the wine of her beauty had been corked up, so far as he was concerned. They ate without speaking, while Emma practised an end-to-end change-over with a double bend in the middle.

"Clever, isn't it?" said George. "She'll do that for hours, sometimes."

"Can she hear what you say?"

"I'm not sure," said George. "She isn't a one for talk. Sometimes she'll sing. I brought you the right food for her, dried seaweed." He got it out of his pack.

At this Janet's composure broke.

"You great gormless thing! Bringing that beady-eyed monster in here! You needn't think I'm going to sit on the sofa with her watching every move I make!"

"But, Janet!" George was thunderstruck. "I brought her specially for you—she's your present."

"Well I'm sorry but she can't stay here."

"But last time I was home you said you wanted company—"

"Company! Not that sort of company." She pointed at Emma, who was blowing bubbles at them. "You'll have to take her back where she comes from."

"But damn it, Janet, that's the middle of the Mediterranean."

"Then sell her to a circus, museum, anything. I can't have her in this house another minute; you know I can't stand things in captivity, I'd never have a canary or a goldfish."

"Emma doesn't mind the bottle," he said, "she likes it, don't you, Em?"

Janet burst into tears. George tried to stroke and pacify her but she ran upstairs and slammed the door.

"Not while that creature's in this house," she shouted through the keyhole.

Injured, crestfallen, George turned down the stairs again. There seemed nothing for it: Emma had to go. And perhaps it was as well, for Sam the cat had jumped onto the mantelpiece and was rubbing his loving length along the glass, through which Emma looked at him with malevolence.

Picking her up, George tramped heavily through the front door, put bottle and mermaid in the pram that stood in the porch, and moved off. A click told him that the door had been snecked against him.

Moonlight blew like silver dust in the empty street and on Emma in her bottle. George made his way to The Falcon, which was kept by Mrs. Agnew, Janet's mother. Maybe she'd take Emma, and change The Falcon to The Mermaid. It was worth trying.

Mrs. Agnew was in the saloon, small and grey, downy as an owl, beak and claws ready to strike.

"Well, George," she said, offering her cheek. "Home again. Captain next trip, I hear."

"Well, Mrs. A. I brought you something from foreign parts."

Mrs. Agnew gave Emma one look and that was sufficient.

"Nothing of that kind in my bar, thank you, George. This has always been a respectable house and will remain so. I've no wish to attract *that* sort of custom."

"What shall I do with her then?" said George miserably.

" Janet won't have her in the house and I've got to find a home for her." He thought with longing of Janet's beautiful roundness under the blue silk, and of the creaks and twangs of the springs of her bed, and for the first time he began to dislike Emma, beady-eyed in her brine.

Mrs. Agnew softened.

" There's Madame Lola from the fun-fair. She's in the lounge this minute, talking to the Captain. She might like a mermaid."

George picked up Emma and went through. Captain Beard and the fortune-teller were sitting in the leather-upholstered corner, very snug, talking about dreams.

" And it's a funny thing," said Madame Lola, " just lately, over and over again, I've been dreaming about plumbing. Big green baths, tiled pedestal basins—mains-flushes without those nasty cisterns—oh, beautiful it's been, Captain Beard. That's the trouble about a caravan like mine, I always say, you have a lot of conveniences but you can't have what I call *superior* plumbing."

Captain Beard rumbled a laugh and tightened his arm, hawser-like, round her ostrich plumes. " You ought to come on board the *Katharina,*" he said.

" Oo, should I? Why? I bet you've got some smashing plumbing there, Captain Beard, and you such a one for having everything just so."

Captain Beard rumbled again, thinking of slops and bilges. " Anyway I'm retiring," he said, " going to live in the old house in Lighthouse Lane. Going to put in a bathroom and make it all shipshape. You'd better come and advise me about the plumbing, Madame Lola."

" Captain Beard! What ever will you suggest next? There, didn't I say I saw a devoted woman in your palm who was going to help you? Now, now, Captain, here's Mrs. Agnew to tell us to behave ourselves."

But when Mrs. Agnew asked her advice about Emma, Madame Lola had no suggestions to offer.

" I'm ever so sorry but we reely couldn't have something like that at the fun-fair, the R.S.P.C.A. are so particular, they'd be round my neck like a ton of bricks. Sorry not to oblige you, dearie."

" I told that boy he'd be courting trouble, taking a mermaid home," grunted the Captain. " Over-excited, he was, getting his Master's Certificate. He'd have done better to leave that bottled nuisance where she belonged."

" Why not ask Mr. Mack? " suggested Madame Lola. " He's so up to date since he's had the deep freeze put in, and all them

climbing ivy plants in pots. He might like a mermaid for decoration."

So George took Emma over to Mr. Mack the fishmonger, who sat browsing over the *Greyhound Dispatch* in another corner. Mr. Mack lifted his shining bulbous eyes from the tiny folded square and had a good stare at Emma; then he said definitely, "No, my boy. *Oh* no. What ever would my customers say? Why, it would be as good as making them think they was cannibals. Oh no, no, that wouldn't do at all. If I was you I'd give her to a zoo, yerss, that's what you want to do, give her to a zoo." And he flapped into his paper again.

"But there isn't any zoo nearer than fifty miles off," snarled George.

The lounge was nearly empty. Mrs. Agnew was pointedly wiping the tiled tables and looking at her watch; Captain Beard and Madame Lola were seesawing towards the door, wreathed in one another's arms like a daisy-chain.

"Why don't you ask the Professor?" said Mrs. Agnew over her tray of glasses. "The one that's staying with the old Miss Ruddocks? He'd know what to do with her, sure's you're born."

"Won't he be in bed by this time?"

"Never before two, not those old parties," said Mrs. Agnew, gently shoving George out of the door. So he pushed the pram down through the moony wind to the big house on the quay where the Miss Ruddocks had lived since they came home from Turkey. At the first ring of the bell the older Miss Ruddock appeared behind the glass door like Cleopatra's Needle and graciously waved him into the morning room, where her sister and Professor Topole were drinking Madeira and watching the bobbing masts through the french window.

"He has a mermaid he wishes to dispose of," shouted Miss Ruddock above the wind.

"Can she speak Turkish?" asked Miss Laura, filling a glass for George. "We need somebody to converse with, our Turkish is becoming sadly rusty. Or even Greek would be useful."

She fired some questions at Emma, but the mermaid had caught sight of her reflection in a Venetian mirror and paid not the slightest attention.

"I'm afraid she doesn't speak," apologized George. "She'll sing a fair treat though, sometimes."

"Aha?" The Professor was all curiosity at once. "Songs the Sirens sang, eh? It has long been disputed whether these would have been in the Greek diatonic scale or the whole-tone; this might be a discovery of great historical importance. Make her sing, young man."

" She'll need to come out of her bottle for that. Maybe I could put her in your bath? "

" In our swimming-bath," suggested Miss Laura. " The one Edwin is so kindly digging for us. We miss our swims across the Bosphorus," she explained to the Professor, " and since our nephew has been prescribed digging as a relaxation he undertook to dig us a pool."

She unbolted the french windows and the party moved out into the moonlit garden beside the harbour. A frantic figure was shovelling soil at one end of a large pool.

" He's a fashion expert, poor boy," said Miss Ruddock kindly. " Very exacting work."

Edwin straightened from his digging and gazed despairingly at his aunts.

He was at the end of his resources. As a fashion designer, he had reached the peak of the profession: he had invented the Haggard look, and filled London and Paris with haggard beauties; he had invented the K-line and the Swan Bend; he could mould womanhood to his fancy. But now he had run out of ideas. He loved his aunts, but they did not inspire him. Could one inaugurate the Mastodon Look, the Monolith Look? Hopelessly he returned to his digging.

" Have you got the cork out? Now tip her in here," the Professor said. " I'll give her a bar or two on my recorder to start her off."

But Emma needed no starting. As soon as she was tipped into the swimming-pool she began to sing in a tinny croon:

You may not be an an-gel,
An-gels are all too fe-ew,
But until the day that one comes along
I'll string along with ye-ew . . .

" Tut, tut," said the Professor crossly. " *That's* no use to me, young man." And he turned and went indoors, back to the Madeira, followed by the two Miss Ruddocks.

George stared sadly at Emma in the pool, faced with the prospect of getting her back into the bottle. And what then?

But at this moment Edwin Ruddock came bounding along the bank, filled with new vitality and enthusiasm.

" Is she yours? " he cried. " She's magnificent! I'll give you anything you want for her. The Mermaid Look! It'll hit London like a bomb. Let's get her back into the bottle and I'll take her straight up to Bond Street tonight. Make-up, hair-styles—it's all come to me in a flash. What's her name? Emma? Here, Emma, Emma—good girl, come to uncle."

It was George who caught her, Edwin who held the bottle. But Emma, intoxicated by her taste of freedom, did not intend to be corked up again. With a defiant flip of her tail she leapt out of George's arms, clean over the harbour wall, and disappeared in a silvery splash between a yacht and a trawler.

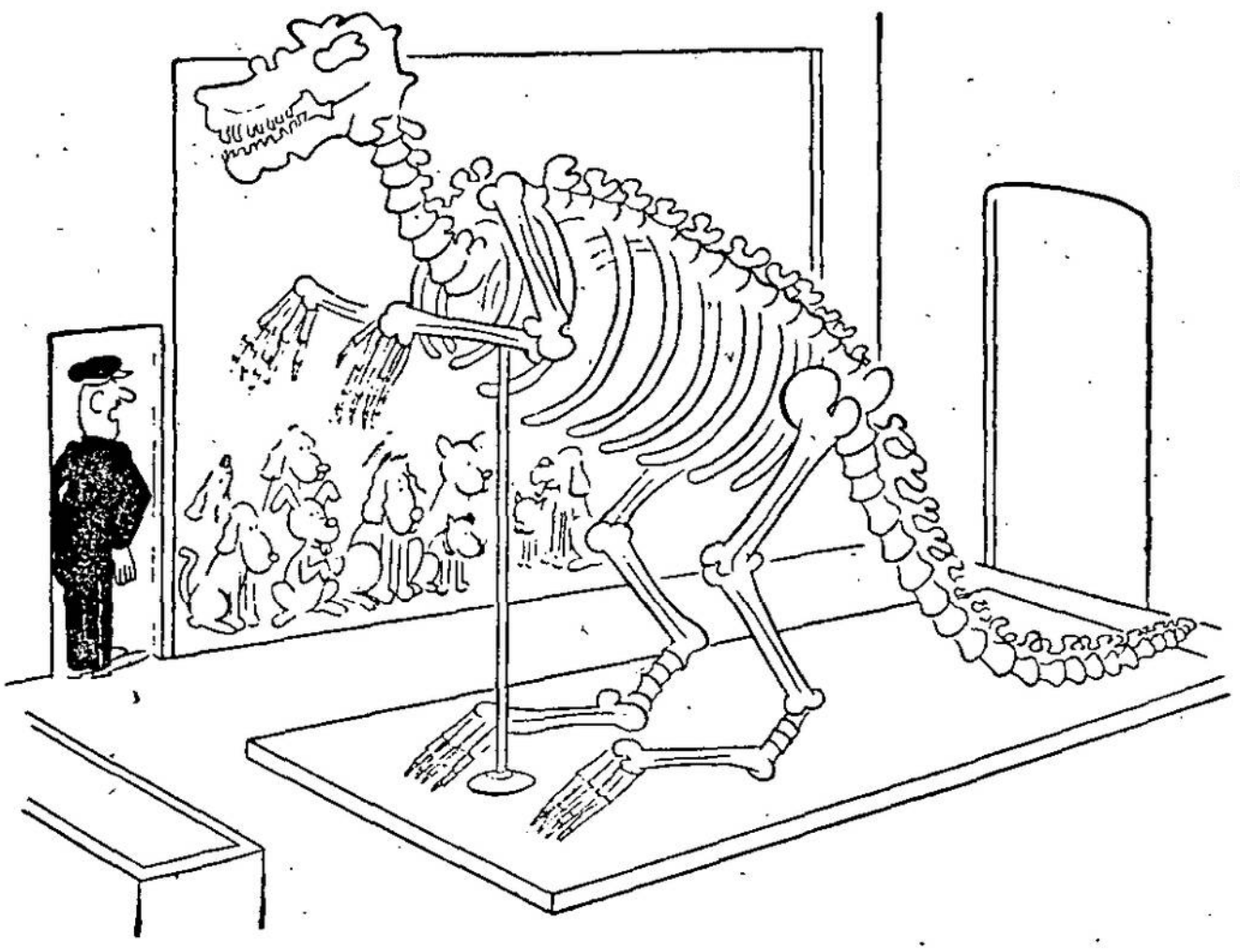
"Well . . ." said George; he stifled a huge yawn. "That's that, I reckon. She'll be off home. And I've had all my trouble for nothing."

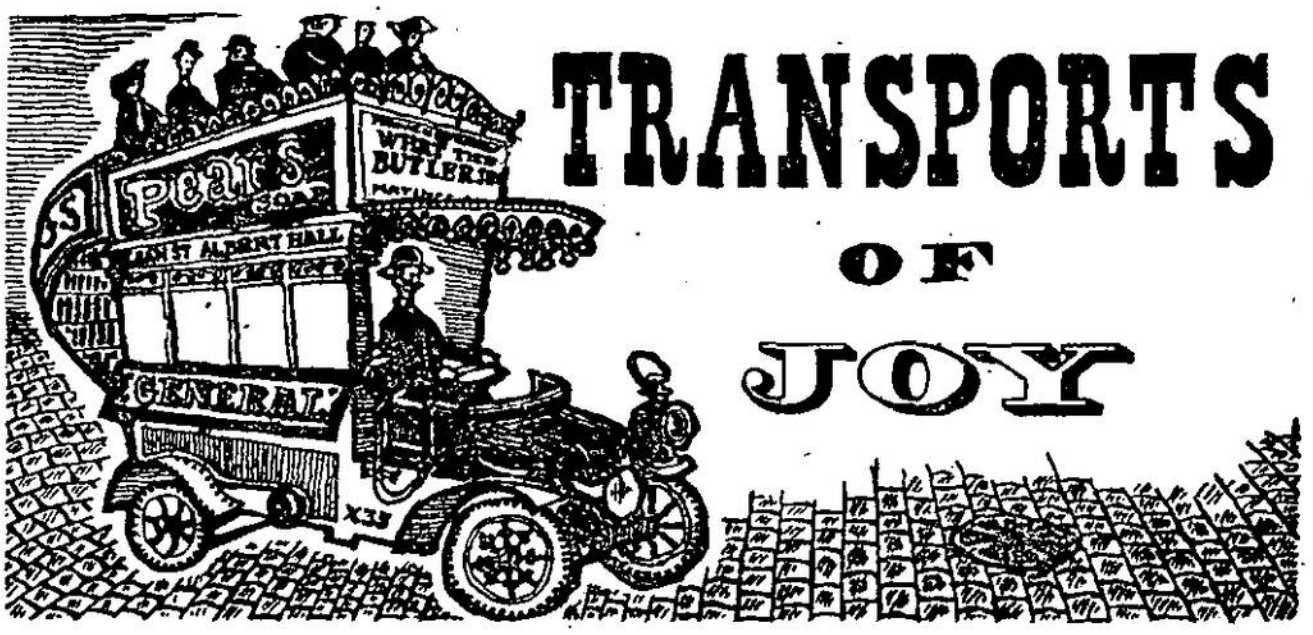
"Green eyes, silver hair," muttered Edwin distractedly, "let me get that noted down before I forget it." He rushed indoors for paper and pencil.

George went round to the front of the house and collected his pram. As he pushed it wearily up the hill it occurred to him for the first time to wonder why a pram had been standing in his porch? Last time he was home it had not been there. But he was too tired to think much about it.

He found the door unlatched and went softly up the dark stairs. Janet stretched a warm, sleepy arm to welcome him, and Sam the cat purred a rampant greeting from the bed-end.

"Ssh . . ." Janet murmured as he threw his boots at a patch of moonshine, "remind me to tell you something in the morning. And by the way"—her voice was almost drowned by the purring and the wind outside—"I think it's time we got married."





TRANSPORTS OF JOY

But you'd look sweet upon the seat . . .

HARRY DACRE, *Daisy Bell*

Later in the evening, when we had all had a good deal more *arak* and had sent Kunter out for yet another bottle of *brum*, and Chokorda Rai had sung us a little song, we somehow got on to the subject of abduction, which Chokorda Agung told us was a fairly ordinary part of life in Bali. Laughing merrily, he told us how he had abducted his second wife, and had even abducted wives for his servants.

"Of course," he added, "it depends on whether the servant and the woman he wants are good people, otherwise I would not go to all that trouble to do it."

"How do you abduct people?" I asked, not quite certain whether or not he was joking.

"Well, these days one does it in a car. Suppose you want a village woman, you take a car and park it under a tree on market day. She comes to market carrying things on her head. Then as she passes the car you reach out and pull her in. She doesn't even have time to shout. Usually she thinks first of the things she is carrying, and by then it is too late. We drive off."

"Suppose she doesn't want to come?" Clare said, her feminist instincts well to the fore.

Chokorda Agung looked puzzled. "But of course she doesn't want to come. Why else would we abduct her?" Then, by way of explanation to a rather stupid foreigner, "How can she protest when it is Chokorda that abducts her? If I am of a higher caste, she should be pleased . . ."

"I see," said Clare, not seeing at all. "But in that case, why don't you kidnap every pretty girl you see?"

"What would I do with so many girls?"

SANTHA RAMA RAU, *East of Home*

Train of Thought

" For day travelling the American cars are very convenient," Laurence Oliphant wrote home from the States. " They are always full of pretty girls, and if the scenery is not pretty you can look at them, they are always sure to be looking at you."

PHILIP HENDERSON, *The Life of Laurence Oliphant*

Braking Out

For forty years, for forty-one,
Sparing the profits of the sun,
This farmer piled his meagre hoard
To buy at last a rattly Ford.

Now crouched on a scared smile he feels
Motion spurt beneath his heels,
Rheumatically intent shifts gears,
Unloosing joints of rustic years.

JOHN PEALE BISHOP, *This Dim and Ptolemaic Man*

Getting up Steam

On Tuesday we prevailed upon Papa to let us have an expedition to the Railroad and most excellent fun we had. We breakfasted early and got to Newton **just in time** to catch the Steam Carriage. I had no idea it was anything half so grand and we almost screamed with delight when first the Engine came in sight. I did not think the pace we went particularly fast going to Liverpool; they said it was about 15 miles an hour and they stopped so often to take in Passengers which was rather tiresome, but coming back it was quite delightful. We whizzed along quite to our hearts' content. We took luncheon with us which we ate upon an immense stone a little way out of Liverpool, but could scarcely eat for laughing at the romantic spot we had chosen.

HARRIET BROOKE, *in a letter to Catherine Glynne*

Green Line

". . . Still I wait
And peer into the darkness: still
Thou com'st not—I am desolate.

" Hush! hark! I see a towering form!
From the dim distance slowly roll'd
It rocks like lilies in a storm,
And O, its hues are green and gold:

" It comes, it comes! Ah rest is sweet,
And there is rest, my babe, for us! "
She ceased, as at her very feet
Stopp'd the St. John's Wood omnibus.

C. S. CALVERLEY,
Waiting

Untrammelled

But I seem to recall best a journey we made by tram one winter night.

We were going to visit my Granny at Westoe, and I was very excited, because an evening excursion was something quite unheard of for me. It had been raining; the gas lamps lit the gleaming pavements and cobbles with a doubled radiance. The shaking tram wires were sending down showers of white raindrops.

Everything in the tram seemed fresh and glittering. The breezy windows sparkled with long zig-zags of rain and the passing street lamps gorgeously flared through the panels of blue and yellow and ruby glass. Outside, it was cold and windy, and we could feel the gale buffeting against the side of the tram, making it sway and lurch more than usual, and throwing the passengers against one another. There were bursts of laughter and snatches of song, and the fresh, clean, cold sea-wind was blowing right through the upper deck. Above, a high half-moon seemed to be skidding along on its back through piles of black, white-lined rags.

It was a wild night, with a sense of magic in the offing. The people in the tram did not seem like ordinary mortals; a kind of exhilarating gaiety had seized them, and it seemed to lighten their bodies and illuminate their faces. At times I was sure we were really flying.

JAMES KIRKUP, *The Only Child: An Autobiography of Infancy*

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

LOST LEADER

Flames lit the rooftop scene with a cruel light

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE late-afternoon sun, shining through the barred skylight, striped the bodies of the four boys sprawled on the floor. Nearby the Sunday traffic went panting down the Wandsworth High Street, but in this quiet, upper back room the loudest noise was the buzzing of a bluebottle. The warm, imprisoned air smelt of copperas and leather and gun oil.

The oldest and tallest of the boys was sitting up, with his back propped against the wall. In one hand he held a piece of cloth, something that might once have been a handkerchief, and he was using it to polish and repolish a powerful-looking air-pistol.

"They're beauties, ent they, Rob?" said the fat boy. He and the red-haired boy both had guns like their leader's. The smallest boy had nothing. He couldn't take his eyes off the shining beauties.

"Made in Belgium," said Rob. "See that gadget?" He put the tip of his finger on the telltale at the end of the compression chamber. "You don't just open it and shut it, like a cheap air-gun. You pump this one up slowly. That gadget shows you when the pressure's right. It's accurate up to fifty yards."

"*It* may be accurate," said the fat boy. "What about us? I've never had a gun before."

"We'll have to practise. Practise till we can hit a penny across the room."

"Why don't we start right now, Rob?" said the red-haired boy. "These things don't make any noise. Not to notice. We could chalk up a target on the wall—"

"Yes?" said Rob. "And when the geezer who owns this shop comes up here tomorrow morning, or next week, or whenever he does happen to come up here, and he finds his wall full

of air-gun pellets, he's going to start thinking, isn't he? He's going to check over his spare stock, and find three guns missing. Right?"

"That's right," said the fat boy. "Rob's got it figured out. We put everything else back like we found it, it may be months before he knows what's been took. He mayn't even know anyone's broke in."

The leader turned to the smallest of his followers. "That's why you can't have one, Winkle," he said. "There's plenty of guns in the front of the shop, but we touch one of them, he'll miss it."

"That's all right, Rob," said Winkle. But he couldn't keep the longing out of his voice. To own a big, bright gun! A gun that went *phtt* softly, like an angry snake, and your enemy fifty yards away crumpled to the ground, not knowing what had hit him!

"What about Les?" said the red-haired boy.

"What about him?"

"He'll want a gun when he sees ours."

"He'll have to go on wanting. If he's not keen enough to come with us on a job like this."

"'Tisn't that he's not keen," said the fat boy. "It's his old man. He's pretty strict. He locks his bedroom door now. Where are we going to practise, Rob?"

"I've got an idea about that," said the tall boy. "You know the old Sports Pavilion? The Home Guard used it in the war, but it's been shut up since."

The boys nodded.

"I found a way in at the back, from the railway. I'll show you. There's a sort of cellar with lockers in it. That'll do us fine. We'll have our first meeting there tomorrow. Right?"

"Right," they all said. The red-haired boy added, "How did you know about this place, Rob?"

"My family used to live round here," said the tall boy. "Before my Ma died, when we moved up to Highside. As a matter of fact, I was at school about a quarter mile from here."

The fat boy said, "I bet I get a strapping from my old man when I get home. He don't like me being away all day."

"You're all right," said Winkle. "You're fat. It don't hurt so much when you're fat." He looked down with disgust at his own slender limbs.

It was nine o'clock at night nearly a month after that talk and in quite another part of London, that Fishy Codlin was closing what he called his Antique Shop. This was a dark and rambling suite of rooms, full of dirt, woodworm, and the household junk

of a quarter of a century. Codlin was in the front room, locking away the day's take when the two boys came in.

"You're too late," he growled. "I'm shut."

He noticed that the smaller of the boys stayed by the door, while the older came towards him with a curiously purposeful tread. He had a prevision of trouble, and his hand reached out for the light switch.

"Leave it alone," said the boy. He was a half-seen figure in the dusk. All the light seemed to concentrate on the bright steel weapon in his hand. "Slip the bolt, Will," he added, but without taking his eyes off Codlin. "Now you stand away from the counter."

Codlin stood away. He thought for a moment of refusing, for there was nearly twenty-five pounds in the box, the fruits of a full week's trading. But he was a coward as well as a bully and the gun looked real. He watched the notes disappearing in the boy's pocket. There was no hurry. When one of the notes slipped to the floor the boy bent down and picked it up, but without ever removing his steady gaze from the old man.

When he had finished, he backed away to the door. "Stay put," he said. "And keep quiet for five minutes, or you'll get hurt."

Then he was gone. Codlin breathed out an obscenity and jumped for the telephone. As he picked it up, "I warned you," said a gentle voice from the door. There was a noise like a small tyre bursting and the telephone twisted round and clattered to the floor.

Codlin stood, staring stupidly at his hand. Splinters of vulcanite had grooved it, and the blood was beginning to drip. He cursed, foully and automatically. Footsteps were pattering away along the road outside. He let them get to the corner before he moved. He was taking no further chances. Then he lumbered across to the door, threw it open, and started bellowing.

Three streets away Detective Sergeant Petrella, homeward bound, heard two things at once. Distant shouts of outrage, and, much closer at hand, light feet pattering on the pavement. He drew into the shadow at the side of the road and waited.

The two boys came round the corner, running easily, and laughing. When Petrella stepped out, the laughter ceased. Then the boys spun around, and started to run the other way.

Petrella ran after them. He saw at once that he could not catch both, and concentrated on the younger and slower boy. After a hundred yards he judged himself to be in distance, and jumped forward in a tackle. It was high by the standards of Twickenham, but it was effective, and they went down, the boy underneath.

As they fell, something dropped from the boy's pocket and slid, ringing and spinning, across the pavement.

" Of course you've got to charge him," said Haxtell later that night. " It's true Codlin can't really identify him, but the boy had a gun on him, and he was running away from the scene of the crime. Who is he, by the way? "

" His name's Christopher Connolly. His father's a shunter at the goods depot. I've left them together for a bit, to see if the old man can talk some sense into him."

" Good idea," said Haxtell. " Can we get anything on the gun? "

" It's an air-pistol. Therefore no registration number. And foreign. Newish. And a pretty high-powered job. If it's been stolen we might have it on the lists."

" Check it," said Haxtell. " What about his pockets? "

" Nothing except this." Petrella pushed across a scrap of paper. It had pencilled on it, in capital letters: WILL. BE AT. USUAL PLACE 8 TONIGHT.

" What do you make of it? " said Haxtell.

" It depends," said Petrella cautiously, " if you think the dot after the first word is a full stop or just an accident."

Haxtell tried it both ways. " You mean it could be a plain statement: ' I will be at the usual place at eight o'clock tonight.' Or it could be an order, addressed to someone called Will."

" Yes. And Codlin did say that he thought he heard the bigger boy address the smaller one as Will."

" Is Connolly's name William? "

" No, sir. It's Christopher George. Known to his friends as Chris."

" What does he say about the paper? "

" Says I planted it on him. And the gun, of course."

" I often wonder," said Haxtell, " where the police keep all the guns they're supposed to plant on criminals. What about the other boy? "

" He says that there was no other boy. He says he was alone, and had been alone, all the evening."

" I see." Haxtell stared thoughtfully out of the window. He had a sharp nose for trouble.

" One bright spot," he said at last. " Codlin always marked his notes. Ever since he caught an assistant trying to dip into his till. He puts a letter C in indelible pencil on the back."

" That might be a help if we can catch the other boy," agreed Petrella. He added, " Haven't I heard that name Codlin before? Something about a dog."

"He tied his dog up," said Haxtell. "A nice old spaniel. And beat him with a golf club. Fined forty shillings. It was before your time."

"I must have read about it somewhere," said Petrella.

"And if you think," blared Haxtell, "that that's any reason for not catching these—these young bandits—then I dare you to say it."

"Why, certainly not," said Petrella hastily.

"This is the third hold-up in a fortnight. The third that's been reported to us. All with guns—or what looked like guns. Now we've caught one of them. We've *got* to get the names of the other boys out of him. For their sake as much as anything. Before someone really gets hurt."

"I expect the boy'll talk," said Petrella.

Haxtell nodded. Given time, boys usually talked.

But Christopher Connolly was an exception. For he said nothing, and continued to say nothing.

The next thing that happened, happened to old Mrs. Lightly, who lived alone in a tiny cottage above the waterworks. Her husband had been caretaker, and she had retained the cottage by grace of the management, and as long as she paid the rent of ten shillings a week. Lately she had been getting irregular in her payments, and she was now under notice to quit.

The evening after the capture of Connolly, just after dark, she heard a noise down in her front hall. She was a spirited old lady, and she came right out, carrying a candle to see what it was all about.

On the patched linoleum lay a fat envelope. Mrs. Lightly picked it up gingerly and carried it back to the sitting-room. She got very few letters, and, in any case, the last post had come and gone many hours earlier.

On the envelope, in pencilled capital letters, were the words: EIGHT WEEKS RENT FROM SOME FRIENDS.

Mrs. Lightly set the candle down on the table, and with fingers that trembled tore open the flap. A little wad of notes slid out. She counted them. Two pound notes and four ten-shilling notes. There was no shadow of doubt about it. It was four pounds. And that was eight weeks' rent.

Or, looked at in another way, suppose it was seven weeks' rent. That would have the advantage of leaving ten shillings over for a little celebration. The whole thing was clearly a miracle; and miracles are things which the devout are commanded to commemorate. Mrs. Lightly placed the notes in the big black bag, folded the envelope carefully away behind a china dog on the mantelshelf, and got her best black hat out of the cupboard.

On the same evening, shortly after Mrs. Lightly left her cottage, four boys were sitting in the basement changing-room of the old Sports Pavilion. A storm lantern, standing on a locker, shed a circle of clear white light around it, leaving the serious faces of the boys in shadow. The windows were carefully blacked out on the inside with cardboard and brown paper.

"I don't like it, Rob," the black-haired boy was saying. He was evidently repeating an old argument.

"What's wrong with it?" said the tall boy. He had a curiously gentle voice.

"Old Cator's what's wrong with it. He's a holy terror."

"He's a crook," said the fat boy.

The small boy said nothing. His eyes turned from one to the other as they spoke, but when no one was speaking they rested on the tall boy, full of trust and love.

"Isn't it crooks we're out to fix?" said the tall boy. "Isn't that right, Busty?"

"That's right," said the fat boy.

The black-haired boy said, "Hell, yes. But not just any crooks. Cator's got a night-watchman. And he's a tough, too. As likely as not, they both carry guns."

The tall boy said, "Are you afraid?"

"Of course I'm not afraid."

"Then what are we arguing about? There's four of us. And we've got two guns. There's two of them. When we pull the job, maybe only one'll be there. This is something we've *got* to do. We need the money."

"Another thing," said the black-haired boy. "Suppose we don't give quite so much away this time."

"You mean, keep some for ourselves?"

"That's right."

"What for?"

"I could think of ways to use it," said the black-haired boy, with a laugh. He looked round, but neither of the others had laughed with him. "All right," he said. "All right. I know the rules. Let's get this planned out."

"This is how it is, then," said the tall boy. "I reckon we'll have to wait about a week—" He demonstrated, on sheets of paper, with a pencil, and the four heads came close together, casting long shadows in the lamplight.

Next morning Petrella reported to Superintendent Haxtell the minor events of the night. There was a complaint from the Railway that some boys had broken a hole in the fence below the Sports Pavilion.

" Apart from that," said Petrella, " a beautiful calm seems to have fallen on Highside. Oh—apart from Mrs. Lightly."

" Mrs. Lightly? "

" Old Lightly's widow. The one who lives in the cottage next to the waterworks."

" Was that the one there was a bit in the papers about how she couldn't pay her rent? "

" That's right," said Petrella. " Only she got hold of some money, and that's what the drinking was about. It was a celebration. She seems to have drunk her way steadily along the High Street. Mostly gin, but a certain amount of stout to help it down. She finished by busting a shop window with an empty bottle."

" Where'd she got the money from? "

" That's the odd thing. She was flat broke. Faced with eviction, and no one very sympathetic, because they knew that as soon as she got any money she'd drink it up. Then an angel dropped in, with four quid in an envelope."

" An angel? "

" That's what she says. A disembodied spirit. It popped an envelope through the letter-box with four ten-shilling notes and two pound notes in it."

" How much of it was left when you picked her up? "

" About two pounds ten," said Petrella.

" I don't see anything odd in all that," said Haxtell. " Some crackpot reads in the papers that the old girl's short of money and how her landlord's persecuting her, and he makes her an anonymous donation, which she promptly spends on getting plastered."

" Yes, sir," said Petrella. He added gently, " I've seen the notes she *didn't* spend. They're all marked on the back with a C in indelible pencil."

" They're *what*? "

" That's right, sir."

" It's mad."

" It's a bit odd, certainly," said Petrella. Something, a note almost of smugness in his voice, made the Superintendent look up. " Have you got some line on this? "

" I think I might be able to trace those notes back to the boy who's been running this show."

" Then don't waste any time talking about it," said Haxtell. " We need results, and we need 'em quickly. We've got to get some results." He added, with apparent inconsequence, " I'm seeing Barstow this afternoon."

Petrella's hopes, such as they were, derived from the envelope,

which he had duly recovered from behind the china dog on Mrs. Lightly's mantelshelf. The name and address had been cut out, but two valuable pieces of information had been left behind. The first was the name *Strangeway's* printed in the top left-hand corner. The second was the postmark, the date on which was still legible.

Petrella knew Strangeway's. It was a shop that sold cameras and photographic equipment, and he guessed that its daily output of letters would not be large. There was a chance, of course, that the envelope had been picked up casually. But equally, there was a chance that it had not.

Happily, the manager of Strangeway's was a methodical man. He consulted his day-book, and produced for Petrella a list of names and addresses. " I think," he said, " that those would be all the firm's letters that went out that day. They would be bills or receipts. I may have written one or two private letters, but I'd have no record of them."

" But they wouldn't be in your firm's envelope."

" They might be. If they went to suppliers."

" I'll try these first," said Petrella.

There were a couple of dozen names on the list. Most of the addresses were in Highside or Helenwood.

It was no use inventing any very elaborate story. He was too well known locally to pretend to be an insurance salesman. He decided on a simple lie.

To the grey-haired old lady who opened the door to him at the first address he said, " We're checking the election register. The lists are getting out of date. Have you any children in the house who might come of age in the next five years? "

" There's Jimmy," said the woman.

" Who's Jimmy? "

She explained about Jimmy. He was a real terror. Aged about nineteen. Just as Petrella was getting interested in Jimmy she added that he'd been in Canada for a year.

Petrella took down copious details about Jimmy. It all took time, but if you were going to deal in lies, it was well to act them out.

That was the beginning of a long day's work. Early in the evening he came to No. 11 Parham Crescent. The house was no different from a million others of the brick boxes that encrust the surface of London's northern heights.

The door was opened by a gentleman in shirtsleeves, who agreed that his name was Brazier and admitted to the possession of a sixteen-and-a-half-year-old boy called Robert.

" Robert Brazier? "

" Robert Humphreys. He's my sister's son. She's been dead two years. He lives here—*when* he's home."

Petrella picked up the lead with the skill of long experience. Was Robert often away from home?

Mr. Brazier obliged with a discourse on modern youth. Boys nowadays, Petrella gathered, were very unlike what boys used to be when he—Mr. Brazier—had been young. They lacked reverence for their elders, thought they knew all the answers, and preferred to go their own ways. " Sometimes I don't see him all day. Sometimes two days running. He could be out all night for all I know. It's not right—Mr.—um—"

Petrella agreed that it wasn't right. Mr. Brazier suffered from such acute halitosis that listening to him was an ordeal. However, he elicited some details. One of them was the name of the South London school that Robert had left eighteen months before.

Petrella did some telephoning, and the following morning he caught a bus and trundled down to Southwark to have a word with Mr. Wetherall, the headmaster of the South Borough Secondary School for Boys. Mr. Wetherall was a small, spare man with a beaky nose and he had been wrestling for a quarter of a century with the tough precocious youths who live south of the river. The history of his struggles was grooved into his leathery face. He cheerfully took time off to consider Petrella's problems; all the more so when he discovered what was wanted.

" Robert Humphreys," he said. " I had a bet with my wife that I'd hear that name again before long."

" Now you've won it, sir."

" Yes," said Mr. Wetherall. He gazed reflectively round his tiny, overcrowded study, then said, " This is a big school, you know. And I've been here, with one short break, for more than ten years. Two or three complete generations—maybe two thousand boys. And out of all that two thousand I could count on the fingers of one hand—without using the thumb—the ones whom I call natural leaders. And of those few I'm not sure I wouldn't put Robert Humphreys first."

Mr. Wetherall added, " I'll tell you a story about him. While he was here, we were planning to convert a building into a gymnasium. I'd got all the governors on my side except the Chairman, Colonel Bond. He was opposed to spending the money, and until I'd won him over, I couldn't move. One day the Colonel disappeared. He's a bachelor who spends most of his time at his Club. No one was unduly worried. He missed a couple of governors' meetings, which was unusual. Then I got a letter. From the Colonel. It simply said that he had been

thinking things over, and had decided that we ought to go ahead with our gym. He himself wouldn't be able to attend meetings for some time, as his health had given way."

Petrella goggled at him. "Are you telling me—?" he said.

"That's right" said Mr. Wetherall calmly. "The boys had kidnapped him. Robert organized the whole thing. They picked him up in a lorry, and kept him in a loft, over an old stable. Guarded him, fed him, looked after him. And when they'd induced him to write that letter, they let him out."

"How did they disguise themselves?"

"They made no attempt to disguise themselves. They calculated, and rightly, that if the Colonel made a fuss people would never stop laughing at him. The Colonel had worked the sum out too, and got the same answer. He never said a word about it. In fact, it was Humphreys who told me. It was then that I made my confident prediction. Downing Street or the Old Bailey."

"I'm afraid it may be the Old Bailey," said Petrella, unhappily.

"It was an even chance," said Mr. Wetherall. "He was devoted to his mother. If she hadn't died, I believe there's hardly any limit to what he might have done. He's with an uncle now. Not a very attractive man."

"I've met him," said Petrella. As he was going he said, "Did you get your gym?"

"I'll show it to you as we go," said Mr. Wetherall. "One of the finest in South London."

It took another whole day for Petrella to finish his inquiries, but now that the clue was in his hand, it was not difficult to find the heart of the maze. It had been a day of blazing heat; by nine o'clock that night when he faced Superintendent Haxtell, hardly a breath was moving.

"There are four of them," he said. "Five with Chris Connolly, the one we caught. First, there's a boy called Robert Humphreys. His first lieutenant's Brian Baker, known as Busty."

"A fat boy," said Haxtell. "Rather a good footballer. His father's a pro."

"Correct. The third one is Les Miller."

"Sergeant Miller's boy?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

The two men looked at each other. Sergeant Miller was Petrella's opposite number at Pond End Police Station.

"Go on," said Haxtell grimly.

"The fourth, and much the youngest, is one of the Harrington boys. The one they call Winkle. His real name's Eric, or

Ricky. There seems to be no doubt that the air-guns they've been using were stolen from a shop in Southwark, which is, incidentally, where Humphreys went to school."

"And Humphreys is the leader?"

"I don't think there's any doubt about that at all, sir. In fact, the whole thing is a rather elaborate game made up by him."

"A game," said Haxtell, pulling out a handkerchief and wiping the sweat from his forehead.

"Of Robin Hood. That's why they used those names. Fat Brian was Friar Tuck, red-headed Chris was Will Scarlet, Les was the Miller's son. And Ricky was Allen-a-Dale. Robert, of course, was Robin. I believe that historically—"

"I'm not interested in history. And you can dress it up what way you like. It doesn't alter the fact that they're gangsters."

"There were two points about them," said Petrella. "I'm not suggesting it's any sort of mitigation. But they really did adhere to the ideas of their originals. They didn't rob old women or girls—and they're usually the number-one target for juvenile delinquents."

Haxtell grunted.

"They chose people they thought needed robbing." Petrella caught the look in his superior's eye and hurried on. "And they didn't spend the money on themselves. They gave it away. All of it, as far as I can make out. To people they thought needed it. More like the real Robin Hood than the synthetic version. Hollywood's muddled it up for us. You hear the kids saying, 'Feared by the bad. Loved by the good.' But that wasn't really the way of it. Robin Hood didn't rob people because they were bad. He assumed they were bad, because they were rich. He was an early Communist."

Petrella stopped, aware that he had outrun discretion.

"Go on," said Haxtell grimly.

"Of course, he's got idealized now," Petrella concluded defiantly. "But I should think the authorities thought *he* was a pretty fair nuisance—when he was actually operating—wouldn't you?"

"And you suggest, perhaps, that we allow them to continue their altruistic work of redistributing the wealth of North London?"

"Oh no, sir. We've got to stop them."

"Why, if they're doing so much good?"

"Before they get hurt. As you said yourself."

Haxtell was spared the necessity of answering by a clatter of feet in the corridor and a resounding knock at the door. It was Detective Sergeant Miller, and he had his son with him.

"Good evening, Miller," said Haxtell. "I was half expecting you."

"I've brought my boy along," said Sergeant Miller. He was white with fury. "He's got something he's going to tell you."

The boy had been crying, but was calm enough now. "It's Humphreys and the others," he said. "They're going to do Cator's Garage tonight. I wouldn't agree to it. So they turned me out of the band. So I told Dad."

Just so, thought Petrella, had all great dynasties fallen. He was aware of a prickling sensation, a crawling of the skin, not entirely accounted for by the onrush of events. He looked out of the window and saw that a storm had crept up on them. Even as he watched, the first thread of lightning flicked out and in, like an adder's tongue, among the banked black clouds.

Les Miller was demonstrating something on the table.

"They've found a way in round the back. They get across the canal on the old broken bridge, climb the bank, and get in a window of an outhouse, which leads into the garage. There's a watchman, but they reckon they can rush him from behind, and get his keys off him. Cator keeps a lot of his money in the garage."

Petrella said, "I expect that's right, sir. We've had our eyes on that gentleman for some time. If he's in the hot-car racket he'd have no use for cheques or a bank account."

"We'd better warn Cator," said Haxtell, "and get a squad car round there quick. What time's the operation due to start?"

Before the boy could answer, the telephone sounded. Haxtell picked off the receiver, listened a moment, and said, "Don't do anything. We'll be right round," and to the others, "It has started. That was the watchman. He's knocked one boy out cold."

As Petrella ran for the car the skies opened, and he was wet to the skin before he reached it.

Outside Cator's Garage, a rambling conglomeration of buildings backing on the canal, they skidded to a halt, nearly ramming a big green tourer coming from the opposite direction. Herbert Cator jumped out, pounded up the cinder path ahead of them, and thumped on the door.

The man who opened the door looked like a boxer gone badly to seed. The right side of his face was covered with blood, from a badly torn ear and a scalp wound. He was holding a long steel stove-raker in one hand. "Glad you've got here," said the man. "Three of the little bastards. I got one of 'em."

He jerked his head towards the corner where fat Friar Tuck lay on his face, on the oil-dank floor.

"Where are the others?" said Haxtell.

"In there." He pointed to the heavy door that led through to the main workshop. "Don't you worry. They won't get out of there in a hurry. The windows are all barred."

Haxtell walked across, slipped the bolt, and threw the door open.

It was a big room, two storeys tall. The floor space jammed with cars in every stage of dismemberment. The top a clutter of hoisting and lifting tackle, dim above the big overhead lights.

"Come out of there, both of you."

"The big one's got a gun," said the man. "He nearly shot my ear off."

"Keep away then," said Haxtell. He turned back again, and said, in a booming voice, "Come on, Humphreys. And you, Harrington. The place is surrounded."

As if in defiant answer came a sudden, deafening crash of thunder. And then all the lights went out.

"Damnation," said Haxtell. Over his shoulder to Petrella and Miller he said, "Bring all the torches we've got in the car. And the spotlight, if the flex is long enough—"

Cator said, "Hold it a moment. Something's alight." A golden-white sheet of flame shot up from the back of the room. Cator said thickly, "They've set fire to the garage, the devils."

In the sudden light Petrella saw the boys. They were crouching together, on an overhead latticework gantry. Cator saw them, too. His hand went down, and came up. There was the roar of a gun, once, twice, before anyone could get at him. Then Petrella was moving.

The light showed him the iron ladder that led upwards. He flung himself at it and went up it. Then along the narrow balcony. When he reached the place where he had seen them, the boys had gone. He stood for a moment. Already the heat was becoming painful. Then, ahead of him, he saw the door to the roof. It was swinging open.

As he reached it, the whole of the interior of the room went up behind him in a hot white belch of flame.

Out on the roof he found the boys. Ricky Harrington was on his knees, beside Humphreys. The flames, pouring through the opening, lit the scene with cruel light.

Petrella knelt down beside him. One look was enough.

"He's dead, ent he?" said Ricky, in a curiously composed voice.

"Yes," said Petrella. "And unless the fire engine comes damned quick, he's going to have company in the next world."

The boy said, " I don't want no one to rescue me." He ran to the side of the building, vaulted the low coping, and disappeared. Petrella hurled himself after him.

He was just in time to see the miracle. Uncaring what happened to him, Ricky had landed with a soft splash in the waters of the North Side Canal.

" If he can do it, I can," said Petrella. " Roast or drown." He jumped. The world turned slowly in one complete fiery circle, and then his mouth was full of water.

He rose to the surface, spitting. There was no sign of the boy. Petrella tried to think. They had jumped from the same spot. There was no current. He must be there. Must be within a few yards.

He took a deep breath, turned over, and duck-dived. His fingers scrabbled across filth, broken crockery, and the sharper edges of cans. When he could bear it no longer he came up.

At the third attempt his fingers touched clothing. He slithered for a foothold in the mud, and pulled. The small body came with him, unresisting.

A minute later, he had it on the flat towpath. He was on the far side of the river, but even so he had to stagger twenty or thirty yards and turn the corner of the wall to escape the searing blast of the heat.

Then he dumped his burden and started to work, savagely, intently fighting for the life under his hands.

It was five minutes before Ricky stirred. Then he rolled onto his side, and was sick.

" What's happened? " he said.

" You're all right," said Petrella. " We'll look after you now."

" Not me, him." Then he seemed to remember, and sat still.

In the sudden silence Petrella heard a distant and plaintive bugle note. He knew that it was only the hooter, from the goods depot, but for a moment it had sounded like a horn being blown in a lonely glade; blown for the followers who would not come.

★ ★ ★

THE PIZZA

Look at itsy-bitsy Mitzi!
See her figure slim and ritzy!
She eatsa
Pizza!
Greedy Mitzi!
She no longer itsy-bitsy!

OGDEN NASH

LOVERS MEETING

Through all the years, I remembered her slim and dark in her glimmering dress

BY MICHAEL FOSTER

COMING down a side aisle of the empty theatre, I saw her standing on the bare dusty stage. It was a hot afternoon in July, and the dull continuous traffic roar of central New York was only a vague undertone to the stillness here. A theatre when it's not working has ghost-echoing silences all its own.

The house was dark, but a couple of lights were burning above the stage, and she must have just come in from the glare outside. She stood there uncertainly, looking out across an area of shadowy vacant seats, trying to see who had stopped so suddenly in the darkness along the wall.

"Hullo?" she said.

For a minute I didn't answer. I couldn't.

In the silence, as the last echo of her voice ended in the farthest gallery corner, she waited. She looked small and lonely up there, and a little scared. I went on down the aisle, then up the paint-spattered old plank to the stage, and after all the years I said again, "Hullo, Marya."

As she saw me come up out of the shadows, her hand crept slowly to her throat. Now it was her turn not to say anything.

I had thought, on many a sleepless midnight, that maybe some time we might see each other again, somewhere, but I'd never thought of it being dusty and commonplace like this. At some party, perhaps, with everyone all dressed up, and sparkle, and laughter, I might look around suddenly and see her; or on some opening night, among the crowd in the foyer at the end of the second act when everyone knew that another play was going over. I'd thought of a lot of ways we might meet again, all of them dramatic and, I guess, being human, mostly flattering to myself. Not wandering round an empty theatre, in my shirt-sleeves and braces with a dead cigar stub in my mouth, like a watchman.

There was a touch of shabbiness about her, too: her summer dress was crisp, but it was probably two or three years old, and the once-expensive bag she carried was worn shiny at the edges.

Yet even under those harsh overhead lights her face, with dark hair pinned softly back, was as beautiful, but quieter than when we both were very young. And she was looking at me with the damndest expression of withdrawing dislike that I have ever seen in a woman's eyes.

" I heard they were ready to start casting here," she said.

" Broadway gossip," I said. " This one isn't a big cast. Only eight people. It's practically filled already."

" If I'd known you were here I wouldn't have come," she said. She said it simply, and I knew it was true.

" It's been a long time," I said, I hoped as simply and as curtly. " Where've you been? "

" What does it matter where I've been? How can it be anything to you? " She waited a moment, biting her lip.

" I've just come back," she said. " I've been away. I only happened to hear, I mean about casting going on in this theatre. The agency didn't send me—I just happened to hear some talk and . . . I didn't know that it meant you."

I thought how easily, if this were a scene in a play I was directing, I could tell some uncertain actor exactly the right gesture to make at this point. Some seemingly casual gesture or movement that would shift all the elements suddenly into place and bring the play back to him. But I couldn't think of anything for myself. Instead, I dumbly took the chewed-up cigar out of my mouth and looked at it and then put it back again.

She said, " I heard that this is a good play. Very different, I heard."

" Yes. Men and women don't ever get any different or any better," I said. " But thank God the plays do. There's a part in this one for which you might be O.K.",

" I don't want it," she said promptly.

" That's O.K., too," I said.

We were both playing raggedly and miserably out of character, in view of all we once had meant to each other.

" Look, Jim, let's be honest," she said. " We might as well be. I came here looking for a part, but you wouldn't want to have me in a play you're producing. And I'm not at all sure that I'd be any good at working for you."

" That remains to be seen," I said. " I think you suit the part well enough, and that's all I'm interested in. Give me your phone number."

She looked at me a long strange time; then she took a little diary out of her bag and wrote a number on a blank page. She tore the page out and handed it to me. " The name is Mrs. MacLaren," she said dryly.

"All right, then," I said, and the hoarseness of my voice surprised me. I cleared my throat harshly. "I'll get someone from here to phone you tomorrow," I said, and tried to make that sound gentler.

She turned away and I watched her go out through the cluttered and dusty wings. The stage door was standing open that afternoon because Corder, the designer who was doing the decor for this play, had been prowling round most of the day, muttering to himself as he worked out his plans. The bitterer the muttering, the more fine and imaginative the sets were going to be. I had told everyone to stay out of his way.

I listened to Marya's quick light footsteps diminishing farther and farther along the passage until they went out of the door and were gone.

I walked slowly backstage and down the concrete stairs to the dressing-rooms. Before I got to that corridor of doors, all of them blank now but one, I stopped to relight my stub of a cigar. Then I went on down to where Elizabeth's door showed a strip of light.

Elizabeth offstage is not always the superbly poised woman you are accustomed to see carrying a play; though she is when she remembers to be. Not always the woman of profoundly muted passions, which have made half a dozen of her big roles into classic performances of our time. Sometimes they are not muted. She is merely the most intelligent woman I have ever known, and there is still a lot of the Nebraska small-town girl left in her. She was pacing up and down in her dressing-room, waiting for me ominously. Her hair is prairie-tawny, with shadows of darker gold.

"Jim, I want part of the second act rewritten. It's too noisy," she said. "I want to play that climax in understatement. More effective. I want the curtain to come down on deathly silence."

"Might be possible," I said. "But let's wait and see how the lines go at the first full-company reading."

She had lit a cigarette, and as she walked backwards and forwards between the lighted mirror and the other wall, each puff of smoke was like a violently feminine swear left swirling silently in the air over her shoulder. Just as well that they were silent, I thought coolly, and she knew I was thinking it. We had accepted this play together, believing in it, at a conference of cold morning eyes between us in her living-room overlooking Central Park, and for nearly three weeks she had studied her part with deepening enthusiasm—I could tell that by her phone calls to my bachelor flat at two in the morning—but she always has

qualms and overestimates the drawbacks just before we get down to work on any play.

She stopped walking suddenly, and smiled at me, almost shyly. It was her way of acknowledging that I know how to manage her, and that she likes to be managed—up to a certain point. Some time ago, Elizabeth and I had been married for nearly four years.

"We'll pull this off, too," I said. "Everything will be all right." Absently, I riffled the pages of her script on the dressing-table. I saw she had marked it heavily. So I knew we were in for some big fights, in curdled whispers where the rest of the company and the two playwrights wouldn't hear us. But that was all right. That was the way we worked. However tempestuous the break-up of our marriage had been, and whatever faults each of us had, we had always been a good stage team, and we both had sense enough after the divorce not to break that up. "And by the way," I said, "I think we've filled the part of Gretchen."

"Have you?" she said carelessly. "I thought we were thinking of Violet Warrender. I thought we were thinking of bringing Violet in from Hollywood."

"Not delicate enough for Gretchen," I said, clamping hard on my cigar stub. "Small part, but very difficult. Has to contrast with your power. Now this girl is delicate and sensitive and—"

"I have read the play," Elizabeth said icily. "What girl?"

"Well—Marya," I said, perhaps just a shade too loudly and too decisively. "She just happened to drop in."

Elizabeth stopped, with her back to me. She was wearing a pin-striped grey summer suit, very tailored, very New York.

"You remember about Marya. My telling you," I said. "Enough to know she's just the part. I think she's married or something now, but the minute I saw her, I thought—Gretchen."

"Why, of course, Jim," she said. "I think it's a good idea. From all you've ever told me about her, I think it's good casting."

Stealthily, silently, I let a long breath of smoke drift out.

"I knew you wouldn't mind," I said. "After all this time—"

"Why, Jim, how silly of you to hesitate. You're so funny and shy." When Elizabeth smiles at you over her shoulder, with the slanted brows of fun and of companionable understanding—that's the nicest part of having once been married to Elizabeth. "Of course your long-ago innocent must have the part," she said.

"Well, I'll have Al's secretary phone her tomorrow," I said with elaborate carelessness. Al is our manager, and he leaves us pretty much alone. Sometimes I think it's more comfortable for him not to get tangled up between us.

And then Elizabeth and I were looking at each other with the deep, quiet amusement of two people who know each other's secret and not always creditable depths. She knew all about Marya. I had even been able, once grown-up, to make a bitter joke of that long-ago time of youth, of innocence, of belief. Of my consecrated dumbness.

I remember one morning after Elizabeth and I were first married, she was having her coffee and I was walking about the wide room, back and forward past the foot of her bed, telling her about Marya. I remember the winter sun falling across her blue coverlet and across the single yellow rosebud on her breakfast tray, and I remember my harsh laughter, telling her about when I was a boy and about Marya. And Elizabeth's face, shining and interested, watching me over her lifted coffeecup. And then looking away when I laughed again.

When I was a boy, my Uncle Tex owned a theatre in a town on the Oregon coast. It was a cinema, no bigger than others in other small towns, but it was different, because Uncle Tex booked vaudeville acts. He didn't need to; he'd have done about the same business anyway with just the routine film showings. But Uncle Tex was an old vaudeville comedian himself, and he had saved his money—or rather, he had married Aunt Kate who saved it for him, along with her own stage earnings—and by the time show business got lean and skeletal on the road, they both retired, and he bought this shabby country theatre.

So in the days when vaudeville was dying, ours was the only house between Portland and Crescent City presenting live shows in addition to the films. Only two or three acts a week, and mostly old-timers. I remember the Wednesday midnights when Uncle Tex and I would change the front of the house for next week's show, coming in the following day. Uncle Tex would be standing on high, on the top of a tall folding ladder, and I would be on the pavement below with a battered box of glass block letters. "Hand me up an M, boy," he would say, and letter by letter we would spell out the show. We would hear the sounds of the empty small-town street at night—the clatter of a rubbish-bin lid behind the Canton Café, belated footsteps hurrying somewhere, the roar of a big lorry gathering speed on the coast road.

I remember the midnight we spelt up DELANEY & CO. "A large act, Uncle Tex?" I asked.

He shook his head, peering down at me, waiting for the &. "Meg Delaney is an old friend of ours," he said, "and the

Company is her daughter. Name of Marya. Pretty name. Young girl, plays the violin, or some damn thing—I forget. Funny, to think of little Marya growing up. Gimme that &."

I saw her for the first time next evening when I was sent backstage, away from my ushering, with a bottle of liniment for a stiff-jointed old hoofer. She thanked me with a stifled sigh. And then I saw Marya.

A slender dark girl, standing in the shadowy wings, with a viola tucked under her arm. She had on a glimmering white dress, tightly slim and then full-skirted; and the size of the viola, which for an instant I thought was a violin, made her look tinier than she was. She turned her head and glanced at me; and my heart skipped a beat that it never picked up again in all the years afterwards.

We didn't have time to say anything. At that moment Marya's cue came and she went out into the lights—even then a good young modern actress, though with nothing to say. Only a deadpan sort of inward smile, and the slow singing of the deep strings to bring a sudden hush to the house. Those deeper strings fitted a dark Irish voice better than the loud thumpings of our busy little home-town orchestra in the pit; and Meg Delaney for a few minutes went into a real bog-trotter's mutter, half talking, half singing in monotone, and then clearing abruptly into true song, wild and lonely and breakingly gay. It was the nearest the act came to being good. With Marya's quick-slanting bow, like lines of rain in the wind.

Afterwards, Uncle Tex and Aunt Kate took us all to late supper at the Canton Café ; and as the entertainers, ahemming and bowing slightly, gathered deferentially around a somewhat soiled tablecloth, I slipped in next to Marya. I was already show-wise enough to know that Meg Delaney's act was on the old-fashioned side, not quite dull, but without the spark, that miraculous spark that can be struck even against a stony audience.

But Marya's face, young and secret with thoughts, under fly-blown paper roses and dusty-greasy electric light, on a distant coast and long ago—it didn't belong in second-rate vaudeville.

My Aunt Kate presided at the head of the table, and she kept watching Marya and me with a sort of dawning surprise. By the time the Chinaman cleared away the thick crockery and the talk among our elders had become comfortable and old-timey in a haze of tobacco smoke, Marya and I had made our first date.

There wasn't much to do in a town like that. Other boys dressed up after supper and took their girls to the show, but we both worked there—I in a plum-coloured jacket with yellow piping on the lapels and cuffs. Also, our meetings had to be in

the mornings and early afternoons, because there was a three-thirty matinée.

I owned a broken-down jalopy and I skipped school most of that week. Right after breakfast I'd pull up in front of a tin-corniced, pioneer-dated old hotel, the second-best in town, and Marya would come hurrying out. Above us, framed between the gritty stiff lace curtains of a third-floor window, in a vast pale blue wrapper edged with travel-frazzled maribou, Meg Delaney would be watching, and she would wave. We would go clattering out of town on the coast road, into the hills.

The dark fir boughs had the bright new green tips of early spring, and in the morning wind Marya's hair was shadowy-dark as a quail's wings in flight. We were nearly the same age: I just past seventeen, she not quite. It's mildly surprising now to remember how grown-up everybody thought they were around seventeen: to me, she was a woman of the stage. For all my acquaintances among the touring companies, these were my first dates with An Actress.

Sagging noisily along on the busted springs of my jalopy, I remember that I thought of the great tempestuous loves of the theatre which I had read about. Those well-known terrific romances were not placid and domestic like Uncle Tex and my Aunt Kate. But I dared not reach out my hand to touch Marya's. I wanted to, but my nerve failed me with a gulp.

And I remember Marya's cool profile, at the counter of some roadside pull-in. She was smiling a little while I talked about the big work to be done in the modern theatre. That is, I explained with care, the work that new stage techniques were making possible. I had theories. I expect I also wanted to impress her a little, if I could, being so far only an usher myself.

But when Marya turned and looked at me, unsmiling, all those theories for tremendous new stage productions didn't matter.

Still, that evening I brought to their dressing-room my books on modern stagecraft and stage design. Two or three of them were in German; one of our stage-hands, an elderly Bavarian, had helped me read them with many disapproving clucks of the tongue. Not theatre, he said, very bad, nothing looked real.

But Marya's face, bending over the plates of startling black-and-white and some in even more startling full colour—Marya's face was very near to mine, there at her mother's dressing-table. Once, while I was explaining a Reinhardt set, I discovered suddenly that her grey eyes had slid sideways, to watch me; amused, and, I thought, a little bored. Still looking at the great blades of light, the massive blocks of shadow in the illustration, I faltered to a stop.

The night they were to leave, she stopped me in the wings. "I don't want you to come to the bus," she said decisively. "I don't think I could bear it. With the others there. I know, Jim, I know. Let's never say good-bye."

Outside, the music was very loud, building up Meg Delaney's big comedy turn. Marya's lips suddenly brushed my cheek, and then she turned sharply to go onstage.

"But, Marya, I—"

"Let it be this, for now," she said, and started towards the lights. "You heard what I said. I mean it desperately. Stay away—please!"

"Marya—"

"Jim," she said, "I'll write to you. I promise. You'll always know where I am. And I'll wait for you."

Two years later, we were both in New York. I was sort of general handy-young-man around the head offices of a chain of cinemas in Brooklyn. I was supposed to be learning the business end, and I did; the president of the chain was an old friend of my Uncle Tex, and he saw to it that the training was rough and thorough. But in the evenings I was twice as much of a handy-man at a little experimental theatre in Greenwich Village; one of those places where you certainly learnt practical stagecraft, from cleaning caked paintbrushes, borrowing large pieces of furniture and other properties from Village shops and carrying them on your back through the streets, to sweeping out the place on Sunday mornings.

It was a confused but valuable apprenticeship; everybody talked too much, and most of us were very young and poor. Out of it came several good actors and actresses, and two fine modern playwrights. But Marya was already on Broadway.

In a suitcase in my digs I had a year and a half of her letters to me. They recorded, in an exact and slanting girlish hand, the beginnings of a serious young actress in the commercial theatre. Tired, bright rounds of the agencies; Broadway gossip; waiting among a mob of youngsters in a theatre alley on a sweltering summer casting-day; a bit part in a play that flopped. A better part in a play that miraculously clicked for a good run. Then she was with Ann Parnet in *These Our Children*. Still a small part, but she gave it a delicate and sensitive reading. I used to drop in and watch her from the back of the house, and I know.

Marya and I found ourselves in that bleak situation where a very young actress has a small success quickly, while a boy hoping to come up on the technical side still has slow tough years ahead of him. And no money. Barely enough to live.

Most nights we used to walk along a dark street after her show,

holding hands, to her flat in the East Sixties. The dim stairs creaked under our feet. While I made hot chocolate and toast in the kitchenette, I studiously kept my back turned. I could hear the rustle of clothes being put away, the soft click of a high heel as she took her shoes off and found her slippers; and then she would be knotting the belt of her dressing-gown. It was black velvet, lined with turquoise-coloured silk, and it was very slim, very dramatic. My cheap tweed sleeve was threadbare and frayed beside it, as we drank our chocolate, talking endlessly about plays and work and the always-resplendent future as only children of the theatre can.

I know now that she turned down a good many dates, for us to have that after-the-show hour together. When Marya was nineteen her face was small and dark and vivid between the blue collar-wings of that black velvet, and when we said good night at the door her lips were quietly believing, quietly waiting.

Elizabeth that year was at the University of Nebraska. I think of her as a strange and defiant girl walking across a campus I have never seen.

Then as another autumn came, and another play for Marya, there was a new flat in a block on Forty-third Street. And that larger room began to be filled with people and talk, and they brought an atmosphere of money with them. When I was there I seemed to spend a lot of time in the kitchen as unofficial host mixing drinks; New York is full of young men who do that. And something was lost. Marya and I weren't getting along very well: she had beaten me to being successful in an adult world.

Nothing much was said until one night at a party in the Village. There were a lot of people, and I remember some fellow playing much too loudly on the long dimly gleaming concert grand piano. There was a white Chinese shawl draped across one end of it and some woman spilt her drink and everybody laughed much too loudly. Marya and I were standing, one on either side of a tall window, looking at the lights of the city.

She said, trying to make it sound careless, "A reasonable solution is for us to be married, I think. Then you'd be less thin and morose, and we'd be friends again."

"On my thirty dollars a week? I can't even afford to take you out to supper, baby."

"But I can buy us anything we need. It's only that I've had good luck," she said. "It'll only be until you make a hit on Broadway. Then you can pay me back, for the rest of our lives."

"We'll wait until I do make that hit," I said. Helpless in a worldly way, harshly miserable—foolishly touchy and savagely

proud, I was afraid that she had made her suggestion out of pity.

"Jim, you mean you won't— "

"I won't," I said.

There was nothing more to be said; only the silent plea in her eyes: Please, Jim. Please.

"No," I said.

We walked back to where the man was playing the piano. When, after a while, Marya with tear-stung proud eyes turned away and walked across that apartment and got her coat and left, I knew enough not to follow. I stood there looking at the floor. I had kept my head, and lost my first girl.

Things were never the same after that. But there was never any final scene. I just started staying away, more and more, and she became very bright and casual. It may be that a boy's dumb idealism can be a crude form of cruelty to another; of that I am still not sure. Maybe women know, for they are realists.

In those weeks of locked frustration Marya's work, far more important than mine, began to suffer from strain. I could tell, from where I had slipped in at the back of the theatre in time to watch the last act. Her acting was routine, sometimes empty, sometimes strained with frightened effort. I began to see my girl mostly as a small figure in the haze of footlights that I hadn't reached yet. The gifts of youth are often bitter ones. Anyone who says they are not has forgotten.

Bitter enough that one night I was an oiler in the engine room of a freighter, outward bound for the Caribbean and then European ports. I'd worked before on fishing-boats off the Oregon coast, and I came on deck, that midnight, in a coarse shirt with a kerchief around my neck. As I watched Long Island's endless strings of lights slipping by to port, I thought it was best for us both. After a while I felt the long swell of the open sea lifting the ship, and a cold wind came to meet me where I leaned on the rail. That was when my first girl, the Marya of the old days, came back into my heart for years of midnights.

I never thought about Elizabeth with such starry-eyed illusion when we met. She was a friend and a great artist. We worked together, sometimes with perfect teamwork, sometimes with quarrels, but always with a quick precision of seeing the same thing at the same instant. Often, it showed only in the flick of a smile between us, because by that time the illusions of men and women—unreasoned, frail, and maybe immortal—were our profession. And we were both grown-up.

We started work on this new play, with Marya in the delicate, haunted character of Gretchen. First rehearsals are nervous

occasions at best. Although *The Silence Upstairs* is a good play, I watched Elizabeth apprehensively. Life anywhere near Elizabeth hovers between tragedy and great tearing comedy, and both are very real and can be devastating..

Under the big working lights we had the whole company assembled, some of the best character actors on Broadway, and John Dillon playing opposite Elizabeth. All the lines were being read very quietly. But Marya's reading was too quiet, even for now; it was as if sometimes her throat clamped. Then, about the third rehearsal, I found myself watching something rather magnificent. Elizabeth was carrying Marya's faltering attempts by her own sheer artistry—playing to her, drawing her out, subtly underlining the part of Gretchen in a way that only a fine actress can, if she wants to help a supporting player.

More than that, she made friends with Marya and the two of them spent a good deal of time in Elizabeth's big dressing-room. I could hear them talking. It made me very uncomfortable, gave me a sort of hangdog feeling. That was bad enough, but as I was also in a cold funk about the play, I grew damned illogically indignant.

Then one afternoon, Elizabeth motioned me to a stop in the wings. "She's got some problem at home that's paralysing her," Elizabeth said non-committally. "She comes here as a desperate woman, not an actress. You'd better go and find out what's the matter."

At the end of the day I casually waylaid Marya as she was hurrying by with bent head towards the stage door.

"I'm going your way," I said. "Let me give you a lift. We can talk about some of Gretchen's lines in the taxi."

She couldn't refuse. Not when I put it that way. In the taxi I made a pretence of discussing her part, but there wasn't much I could say, either. It wasn't going well, and we both knew it.

She was living in one of those old red-brick lodging-houses on West Fifteenth Street and when we reached it, I hung about talking earnestly, the cabby listening with big ears, until Marya practically had to ask me in, or else be openly rude. So I met Steve MacLaren.

He was a lean, rangy guy, tanned, and beginning to be a bit seamed in the face. When we came in through the door he heaved his easy length out of a creaking busted old chair. I liked the look of him.

"Jim, this is Steve," Marya said. "My husband."

"Hullo, Jim," he said. "I seem to have known you for years. To be exact, the eight years Marya and I've been married. It's time we had a drink together."

He lounged away behind a screen that concealed a sink, and while Marya and I kept on pretending to discuss her part, we heard cheerful clinkings. He came out with the best gin *pahits* I ever hope to taste.

" Recipe of a British nobleman resident in India, but I've improved them slightly with a Mexican touch," he said. " Well, here's to old times, you two kids! " I liked his smile, too.

We drank slowly, Steve and I talking the genial politenesses of a couple who are sizing up each other and a situation. I found out right away that he was a mining engineer and, I could guess, a far wanderer with fortune always somewhere just over the next range of peaks, somewhere up the next jungle river. Marya stood leaning against the wall, with her hat still on. Suddenly she put her glass down on the table between us.

" You're theatre, Jim. You always will be. I've come back, not really wanting to," she said tonelessly. " I don't want to be an actress. I just want to be Steve's wife." After an awkward silence she muttered, " I might as well be honest about it."

Then she looked at him. And for one instant there was something in her face—a sort of secret shining—that made me lower my eyes.

I heard Steve move unhappily in the creaking chair. " Marya's had a hard time," he said, his voice a couple of tones deeper, and softer. " Following me across the world and back. I—well there've been hard times." He fumbled at his glass, then dropped his hand.

" But good times, too. I wouldn't exchange any of it," Marya said.

" Look," I said. " It's nearly seven o'clock. You're having dinner with me."

They glanced at each other, and after a hesitation, Steve nodded almost imperceptibly. You can tell how close a marriage is by little quick understandings like that.

Steve and I waited in the lobby while Marya got ready, and then we all walked through the summer dusk to a restaurant. While a middle-aged German orchestra played sad gaieties, I was given across the tablecloth casual glimpses of the distant places of the earth. They had, in truth, been across the world and back. With fortune always gleaming like faith, gleaming like a high fair-weather cloud dissolving and changing shape, before their very eyes.

" There was a dry camp in Sonora," Steve said, " and— "

Marya said, " The mountains of Sonora can be blue, ink-blue towards evening, and it's one place where you can look at the evening star, knowing that it's another planet out in space, and you

can actually feel the earth travelling on its own orbit. It makes you a little dizzy because it's eternity. And Steve— " I remember thinking that if a play could ever make her look like that, on reading, I could make her a great actress.

" Well, we nearly starved in Johannesburg," Steve went on. " Johannesburg is a bad place to be broke in. But Marya can take next to nothing and cook a dinner that— "

It was a remarkable story. There had been a mine in Mexico, another in South Africa. Dry camps and hunger, and Marya loved it. There was an undeveloped uranium claim in the back country of Australia; a gold prospect in the terrible interior mountains of Borneo, and once they had had a springtime in the snows of the Andes. And Marya had followed him in love and utter belief and sometimes in privation.

I ordered another tall cool bottle of Rhine wine. It is true that I thought of the Canton Café. It is also true that I knew that Elizabeth and I in our work travelled other distances, not geographical, but as far: of the imagination, of another restless seeking in the minds of men and women. The wine was cool indeed to my dry throat. And I listened—to Steve's illusions and Marya's.

" The reason we're here in New York," Marya said, " the reason I'm working, is that Steve has at last the one big chance. The one big final certain thing. For once we can't miss. There's a railroad within thirty-nine and a half miles. That's very important. For the ore, you know. We're here to float the necessary backing. For development. I—well, maybe Gretchen will keep us going until we do. Steve has had interviews with several business men, Jim. It isn't that we're chasing rainbows, Jim."

" Well," Steve said, and from all he said after that I gathered, without his particularly intending me to, that he is an outstanding mining engineer and that when he has to he goes to work again for some big company, and buys Marya new dresses, replacing travel-worn proud old clothes. But now was no time to work on salary for a big company.

" This is too big a thing. There's a fortune in it—a fortune! " So Marya, for the first time, had gone back to the stage to support them.

" Of course, there's still some development work to be done," Steve said.

Now, I don't know anything about mining. I don't want to know anything about it. This new hope is in Canada. It's copper, somewhere up a steep wilderness river. Steve gave me details, wonderful, but I was only half listening. I assumed my

brusquest business man's voice and said, " Funny. I've been looking for a good investment." And cleared my throat with a hard sound like a banker. It worked, because Steve looked at me, and blinked. Then flushed darkly. " No. I've been talking to you as a friend," he said. " I don't use friends."

" I'm not your friend. I hate you," I said, and smiled at him until he smiled slowly back.

" But I like to make money," I said. " What the hell, I have some loose cash. Let's put it to work."

We all three argued, from there. It was silly and pointless, but I concealed my impatience. They were sincere. That was the maddening part; they were sincere, and deeply honest. I won when Marya, her eyes suddenly brilliant with tears that did not fall, reached across the table and touched my hand. " Oh Jim! " she said. But she was looking at Steve.

Next morning, I got down to the job of raising the money. I had some in my bank account, and a couple of years before I'd bought a little stone house up in Connecticut from a bankrupt playwright—one of the best—and I got a mortgage on that, and I have a friend who is a banker and he let me have a loan against my contract. Anyway, in the end I was able to write a cheque for fifteen thousand.

Steve had a lawyer. He had insisted we meet at that office, so we did. There a painstaking legal paper was drawn up, all about my share in this mining property, and when at last we had signed, we went to a bar. And all of a sudden, there wasn't anything to talk about any more. Where once I could not have Marya because I was so bitterly poor, I now had been able to help her on her way, and for her it was a better way.

And then Steve's hand was on my sleeve, and his eyes were strangely deep, and straight. " I know about you and Marya," he said. " I know all about it. Marya told me long ago, half laughing. But half crying, too. It was kind of beautiful, and pitiful too, wasn't it? Both of you so young . . . It happens to everyone some time, I suppose. I'm glad it happened to Marya, with you."

I lifted my glass with the last of my drink. " Thanks, Steve," I said. " But now here's to fortune." And as he lifted his glass to mine, his face was already shining again with the faith, the basic innocence, of a really good man. He, and Marya. Both of them just loving their lives, and they were on their way again.

I took a taxi back to the theatre, and slowly climbed up the carpeted front stairs from the lobby to my small office. I had been sitting for a long time with my feet on my desk, looking

through the window, when I heard the door open quietly behind me. I thought it was Al's secretary and I waved my hand for her to go away, but it was Elizabeth behind me who said, " I've wired Violet Warrender to come. I know, as you said, she's heavy-handed for the part, but . . ."

" How did you know to do that? " I said, not stirring.

" Because I've bought ten thousand dollars' worth of that mine myself," she said.

The traffic clotted and crawled in the street. I kept watching it.

Elizabeth said, " I was waiting round the corner from that lawyer's office. With Marya. I almost beat you to it. Marya is sweet, Jim. I've always known. And so innocent. They both are. So are you, my tough friend. I thought something had better be done. I called Marya for breakfast this morning. And she told me about you and Steve. But you're so unpractical I didn't know if you could raise enough to do any good." The backs of my ears detected a certain distant irony, " So I talked Marya into letting me make some money, too," she said.

" That's fine," I said.

After a while, Elizabeth spoke behind me again, as from a far distance, maybe because she spoke so softly.

" Jim, those things—those scarringly beautiful things—happen to all of us when we are very young. They are part of being young and being so new. And wanting the world."

She hesitated a long time, and then she said, " It happened to me in Nebraska, Jim. But we are grown-up now, and things are different, and we are different."

" I know," I said. " I know, my dear. Forget it."

I heard her take a slow careful breath behind me. Almost guiltily, I took one, too—sheer weary relief.

" Jim,-turn round and look at me."

I did. I turned round. And there was Elizabeth.

A flick of a smile between us. And then—maybe a good way to start a new marriage is when your girl is laughing in your arms.

★ ★ ★

HOME CHAT

But Maurice Goudeket [Colette's husband] remembers one thing about New York which had nothing to do with sky-scrapers or jazz, but in its own way it was just as colourful. Colette, seeing a black cat watching her from a window ledge, stopped and looked at it.

" At last! " she said. " Look. Someone who speaks French."

MARGARET CROSLAND, *Madame Colette*

Gaudy Palace

BY JAN DE HARTOG

THE first white man to sail up the Kali-Woga as far as Rauwatta was Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen, the Nestor of the Government Health Service.

An urgent telegram had ordered him to proceed at once to Tarakan, to the palace of the Governor of Borneo: Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari was dying—an enlightened ruler, a staunch ally of the government, the only Dyak chief who had been to Holland and even spoke Dutch—this man should be kept alive at all costs.

A very important mission, the Governor had said. Brits-Jansen, deeply impressed, had left at once, travelled three weeks up the river, dragging an instrument case and a medicine chest with a cure for every ailment known to man, and had arrived, after a nightmarish trek through mosquitoes, rapids, and crocodiles, in Rauwatta; desolate breeding-ground of plague and malaria on the mud banks of the Kali-Woga.

He was welcomed by the village elders and led in silent reverence to the Sultan's palace where, in the red dusk of smoking torches, the first thing he discerned was a billiard table, green and ugly, its legs standing in coconut shells filled with water to keep the ants at bay. On the walls hung the dried heads of the Sultan's late enemies, and in their midst a photograph in a gilt frame full of curlicues, showing a sly little native in frock-coat and top hat beaming with pride on a swivel chair in the biggest cigar shop in Amsterdam, surrounded by the pale non-committal faces of the shop assistants.

That native was Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari, enlightened ruler of a territory three times the size of Holland, with a population of three thousand.

Young girls lifted a mosquito-curtain behind the billiard table; beyond, in a dark room smelling like a goat sty, he found an ornate Victorian bed; on that bed, the royal patient lay in a coma, thin, tiny, and impressive in his motionless suffering. The girls cautiously lowered the mosquito-curtain again behind the giant doctor with the terrible beard; Brits-Jansen sat down on the edge of the bed, which sagged with a twang of springs, and from the startled glance the patient shot him he concluded that the coma was not a deep one.

The Sultan moaned; his fingers twitched and he swallowed with a choking sound; but the man who could fool Brits-Jansen with a faked illness had still to be born. While examining the childish body he asked himself what purpose an Enlightened Ruler could have in pretending to be ill. When he completed his examination he still did not know the answer.

"Tell what matter Sultan . . ." the patient whispered. "Tell what illness Sultan suffers . . ."

Brits-Jansen slapped the little man's buttocks, answered, "Nothing," and got to his feet. "You'd better get up, sire," he concluded. "You're as healthy as a pig."

For one speechless second, the Sultan gaped at him, flabbergasted by such disrespect, then his sly little eyes filled with fury and he whispered, "Doctor worst doctor Sultan ever seen. Doctor eye and mind of sappo-lidi."

"Possibly," Brits-Jansen answered, "eye and mind of fly-swatter, but I'm the best billiard player in the Far East."

That was too much, even for a Sultan, especially for a Sultan.

Rahula Rattan Rauwari rose in his bed like a cobra, with the murder of twenty head-hunting generations blazing from his black eyes, and hissed, " Sappo-lidi! We shall play! Sultan shall play Sappo-lidi till he is slain! "

" All right," Brits-Jansen answered. " But on one condition: if I win, Sultan is cured for ever."

" And if Sappo-lidi loses? " the Sultan asked slyly.

" Then I'll retire from the Service," Brits-Jansen said, " and nurse Sultan until the hour of my death, as his private doctor."

The Sultan got out of bed without a word. He lifted the mosquito-netting and went towards the billiard table. The young girls, frightened out of their wits, took flight as if they had seen an apparition.

After Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari had chalked his cue, made his first shot, and scored twenty, eyes were peering through all the cracks in the bamboo walls and a silence reigned in the jungle as if an act of God were taking place.

They played on until the red sun rose out of the rolling clouds of morning mist and the birds started twittering in the trees; the Sultan played like a demon, but Brits-Jansen played as only one man could play east of Singapore: Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen of the G.H.S.

That morning, after he had won with an astronomical score and made the Sultan weep with rage, he put his cue in a corner and made a tour of the kampong. The inhabitants fled from him in panic—women, dogs, chickens, yelling children. He walked through a deserted village of age-old huts built on the rotting foundations of even older ones, and he saw why the Sultan had been ill. The miserable huts surrounded the gaudy palace like so many memorials to exploitation and slavery; the sly little despot obviously never showed himself to his victims and fooled them with frequent sick-beds so as to give them hope that he would soon die anyhow. The billiard table alone was a monument to a demigod: it must have cost scores of lives to drag the unwieldy thing across all those rapids between Rokul and Rauwatta.

Brits-Jansen decided to teach him a lesson. He knew that the magic power of the demigod would be finished as soon as his subjects were shown a real god compared to whom their Sultan was a midget. He decided that an official dinner should take place in his honour, when he would show Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari a miracle.

The Sultan haughtily agreed to his proposal, and ordered that a feast to celebrate his recovery should be served that night in the village square, in front of the palace. During the whole of that day the village was full of the crackling of fire, the hissing of boiling water, and the smells of cooking. When darkness fell, a table stood in the flickering torchlight, laden with enough food for a dozen people. Piles of fruit, stewed, boiled, and fried; fish, chicken, eels as thick as a man's arm, and a whole billy-goat, filled with eggs. His own contribution was a pint of gin, his month's ration.

For hours beforehand, the square was thronged with silent, staring villagers.

When the Sultan finally appeared, he was in full court dress; the only things alive in his doll-like pomp were his eyes, taking in the villagers, the table, and the waiting giant, in a raving glance. When their eyes met, Brits-Jansen saw that the Sultan realized they were about to fight another duel, this time for something more important than a lifelong deathbed.

Brits-Jansen gave the Sultan a perfunctory bow, and did not deign to look at him again. He rubbed his hands like a man who has a good appetite, and sat down opposite the Sultan, facing the crowd. He rolled up his shirtsleeves despite the mosquitoes, poured out a full beaker of gin for the Sultan and half a beaker for himself, threw back the drink, licked his lips, slammed down the beaker, and started eating. He had the impression that even the animals of the jungle were peering at him from the smoky darkness behind the torches, but he did not look up. He started eating as only one man could eat east of Singapore: Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen, G.H.S.

The Sultan, after his first sip of gin, closed his eyes and remained motionless; then he shot his opponent a glance of such hatred that Brits-Jansen was delighted. But Rahula Rattan Rauwari took up the challenge, and drained the beaker in one gulp, choking, but without a tremor of his hand.

The banquet lasted until the small hours. During all that time, not a word was said and not a finger moved in the crowd squatting in the square.

It was much more of a battle than Brits-Jansen had expected it to be; he had to gorge himself in order to keep ahead of the Sultan, and the world had been slowly distorted into a whirlpool of darkness full of comets when, at last, Rahula Rattan Rauwari turned turtle—after three beakers of gin, four fish, eighteen eggs, a leg of billy-goat, and two chickens.

The Sultan's defeat was impressive. After half an hour of agonizing efforts to remain upright, he slowly sagged sideways, and slumped to the ground without uttering a sound, majestically silent until the end.

When the demigod fell off his throne, the crowd in the square retired in horror to the very edge of the torchlight; but when the god went on eating as if nothing had happened, they stealthily crept nearer again: small, big-eyed women with babies on their backs, earnest little men who forgot to chew their sirih, tiny children, helpless in the grip of curiosity, who dared only peep over their fathers' shoulders.

Never in his life had Brits-Jansen been so drunk, never had he eaten such a disgusting amount of indigestible food, never had he felt so close to a stroke. Yet he went on eating—fruit, fish, eggs, chicken, and billy-goat—until he knew: one more bite and I'll burst, and my breath will catch fire from all those dancing torches. It would have been better to go on a little while longer; the

triumph would not be complete until he had entirely cleared the table, but, alas, he was only human.

Then—as he sat swaying on his stool, gasping for breath, shaken by hiccups, a white monster with a purple face and bloodshot eyes —he performed the final miracle, the Horrible Deed, that would be whispered down from generation to generation in the Borneo jungle until Judgment Day. He wiped the grease off his mouth with his beard, shoved his topi on the back of his head, looked, for the first time, at the mesmerized crowd with a glassy stare; then he took his upper jaw out of his mouth and smacked it on the table.

One second later, the square was empty of villagers; they were swept into the jungle as by the blast from a bomb.

How he managed to get to his feet he could never remember; he woke up in the Sultan's bed, crawling with fleas. His head hammered and he reeled with nausea, yet he managed to make a tour through the kampong, ignoring the panic he provoked. When he returned to the palace, followed by hundreds of invisible eyes, he had not seen a single native for more than half a second, but he knew that his work was done.

That night the Sultan, tottering and ill, accompanied him to his práhu. As they bowed to one another in dignified farewell, Brits-Jansen was certain that the Sultan would remain healthy and enlightened until his death, for fear that Sappo-lidi might come back; but he knew also that His Highness would spend the rest of his life brooding on a means to get even with him.

Thirty years passed before Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen sailed up the Kali-Woga again, with Rauwatta as his destination. Between the two expeditions lay a life that had become a legend in the Far East. The fat, impertinent young man who had been paddled to the deathbed of the Sultan by five slaves had become the foremost leprosy specialist in the world; the stunt with the dentures had become one of the classic stories told in the clubs and the passangrahans of the archipelago, and the jungle, which had once seemed so menacing and unconquerable, had become as familiar to him as the maze in the Royal Gardens to the head keeper.

The second expedition was really a holiday trip. When he had heard that the district M.O. had fallen ill in a plague outbreak in Rauwatta, he had volunteered to go. He had gone because of the Sultan, the billiard table, and the place where his fame had started thirty years ago; it was a pilgrimage to his youth. He was inoculated with anti-plague vaccine and, considering the gravity of the occasion, left rather hastily, with only six male nurses, plenty of vaccine for the patients, but only a quarter of a tin of P.G.

He cursed his carelessness when he discovered this, one day up the river, and thought of turning round, but decided they would probably send a second expedition after him which was sure to have plenty of P.G. Then he settled down to three weeks of glorious rest; twenty days of sleep, shooting crocodiles, and eating bananas; and then a game of billiards with the Sultan. He hardly thought

of the M.O., dying in the wilderness, and not at all of the plague, which he had managed to tame to such an extent during these thirty years that it virtually bolted the moment it saw his beard, like the Dyaks.

As his small convoy crawled slowly up the river and he sat lolling underneath the awning, cradled by the nostalgic chant of his mandur, he tried to recall the first expedition, and it gradually came back to him.

The first thing he remembered was the fear; he remembered it so vividly that it almost became real once more. Then he started to recognize the bends in the river, the rapids, the twittering birds of dawn and dusk, and the chattering monkeys following them along the river banks. Nothing seemed to have changed in those thirty years, not a tree, not a leaf; everything had remained unchanged for tens of thousands of years. The thirty years of Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen, the leprosy specialist, first seemed to be reduced to ten, then to one, and finally to nothing—a dream, from which he was now awakening. He had never been away from this forest, he had only dozed for a minute on the river.

The hallucination was strong but no stronger than was to be expected. The jungle went after souls, not lives—for thirty years he had taught this to his assistants, when they were new to the East.

The great thing about the jungle was that one should never rely on logic within its green magic circle. The one thing that counted was vitality, the superiority of the lion-tamer. One had to remain utterly sure of oneself; whatever threatened that self-confidence—whether it was a bad conscience, a hangover, or just simply fatigue—had to be crushed with merciless animal force, and that was a battle of life and death.

He had to fight as doggedly to arrive in Rauwatta as he had thirty years before, and now he was thirty years older. The giant who finally set foot ashore in the plague-stricken village felt like a dwarf compared to the trees; when he realized that he was no longer measuring himself against the people round him but against the jungle itself, like any totok who had never seen a waringin tree in his life, he knew that he had not defeated the wilderness yet. Rauwatta also looked entirely unchanged; the mud flats, the huts, the gaudy palace, everything was exactly the same as it had been thirty years ago.

But after his first step ashore things turned out to be very different indeed.

It was almost dark when he arrived, and the first difference he noticed was the smell of the plague, which cured him at once. The village was surrounded by a ring of little flames: the witch-doctors' torches, magic circle against the black death. Within this circle, hundreds of natives lay dying, many more than he had expected; most of these people must be strangers who had come out of the jungle hoping to be cured by the Sultan's magicians.

Moaning and wailing troubled the silence, together with the buzzing of the mosquitoes that swarmed round the torches in thick

clouds. In the glinting darkness of the river the crocodiles lay leering, a ring of motionless pairs of red eyes, just above the surface, luminous like glow-worms. The village was a chaos of dying, dead, and lunatics; heaps of corpses were stacked in the streets between the huts, and in the village square the witch-doctors danced with their bewildered patients round a huge fire made of animal sacrifices.

It was a spectacle that struck even Brits-Jansen with a momentary feeling of horror; but as it liberated him from the spell of the jungle he welcomed it. He made the village elders announce his arrival to the Sultan, and sent his mandur as a representative to the Master of Ceremonies to ask for an audience at ten o'clock. That gave him three hours to clean this pigsty.

He started work. He chased the quacks from the square with bellowed commands and a shot in the air, the echoes of which rolled like thunder down the dark chasm of the river; then he ordered the boats to be burnt. As the panicking villagers tried to flee to their prahus, they found the river bank cordoned off by six armed male nurses, and they saw in front of their baffled eyes all their boats dragged ashore and thrown into the fire of the sacrifices.

After communications with the outer world had thus been cut off, the invaders, in white coats, wearing high rubber boots and long gloves as a protection against the fleas, started to rake the corpses together and throw them into the fire too. The natives, completely dazed and unable to understand any of these magical actions, continued their interrupted tribal dance, this time round the fire in which their prahus were being consumed with explosions of crackling wood, and their dead reduced to ashes with a sickening stench of roasting. The stench grew, remained suspended between the trees, became more pungent and more oppressive, until finally they seemed to be dancing in a ghastly kitchen.

In the meantime, Brits-Jansen had cleared the ground for the first stage of the battle. He had ascertained that the M.O. was dead and buried; he had localized the epidemic. The next step would be to split up the village into sectors for the healthy, the ill, and the dying, to rope off a doctor's camp, to build a hospital, living-quarters, and a laboratory within the fence, and to dig an anti-flea moat round it. The Sultan was too weak to be an obstruction—although he had sent word via the Master of Ceremonies that he would be unable to receive Tuan Doctor until eleven-fifteen the next morning.

It was a deliberate insult, but understandable. If Brits-Jansen had observed court ritual himself he would not have started cleaning up the place before seeing the old man and getting his formal permission. Even this omission had a purpose however: to make it quite clear right from the beginning who was in command.

Everything seemed innocent and normal. He could find no reason at all for the alarming fact that, while watching the fire in the village square, he suddenly found himself humming *Auld Lang Syne*. He had as much musical sense as a monkey; the only music his head had ever harboured was *Auld Lang Syne*.

He occasionally found himself humming the tune, and it had always been just in time to prevent himself from committing an irrevocable mistake. It was uncanny—as if a guardian angel warned him at the last moment by humming that tune into his ear. The last time it had happened he was leaning over a woman, his syringe ready for the injection, about to commit a murder that would have been for love.

The moment came back to him with uncanny clarity, as he stood looking at the funeral pyre in the village square of Rauwatta: the little white room, the bed in its tent of mosquito-netting, the sickly sweet smell of leprosy, the mutilated body on the white sheet. He had just finished examining her, as he had examined her hundreds of times, but instead of straightening up with a sigh and patting her on the shoulder, he had edged slowly away from her with a sudden secretiveness, for the blind, mute body on the bed could follow his movements by listening. He had gone to the wash-basin; he had cautiously broken the phial, filled the syringe, squirted out the air, holding the needle against the light of the oil lamp, humming *Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind . . .* Then he had fallen silent. His eyes, squinting at the tiny fountain squirting out of the needle, had slowly focused beyond it, on the cross on the white wall, the only decoration in the room.

For the first time he had realized that the cross was not a decoration, but the symbol of the life he was about to extinguish. It was the credo of the mutilated body on the bed, to whom nothing now remained of the days when she had been a beautiful woman, except her faith, which was more than he had ever possessed himself. He had stood there for a long while, the syringe against the light, staring at the cross on the wall; then he had started to hum again, louder this time, to hide from the listening body in the mosquito-tent the sounds of the syringe being opened and emptied in the wash-basin, the opening and shutting of the chromium box, the snap of the lock on his instrument bag. *We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet . . .*

He had gone back into the night without bidding her good-bye, shutting the door softly behind him. The white buildings of the leper colony had shimmered like ivory in the moonlight, and echoed the sound of his footsteps as he crossed the courtyard to his laboratory. In his laboratory he had not put on the light; he had slumped down at his work bench, his head in his hands, and wept among the bottles and the test-tubes, which timidly reflected the moonlight.

Why had he hummed that tune now, tonight? He was old enough to have realized long ago that chance plays only a small part in a man's life. Every thought and every action obeyed a law of cause and effect; the fact that he had hummed the tune while looking at a funeral pyre in Rauwatta was the effect of a cause that he now tried to hunt down doggedly, but in vain.

His mandur had put up a temporary shelter of palm leaves on the edge of the village, after having burnt down a square of grass and

dug a flea moat around it. He undressed by the light of a storm lantern, lay down on his camp bed, and tried to sleep, but the stench of disinfectant, burnt grass, and roasting kept him awake. Also, his thoughts would not rest; they kept going back to *Auld Lang Syne*, and Betsy, the woman he had almost murdered. He had not thought about Betsy for over a month now; that was of course the reason why he had felt so good. He wondered how she was, and how Willem was, nursing her with his unfailing love and devotion.

Now his thoughts had gone back to Betsy, the dominating element of his life. Suppose he had never broken through the undergrowth with his horse that night in Java, when he had got lost on his way to the next passangrahan?

When he broke through the undergrowth he had seen an open space in the jungle, a fire in the centre. Dark shapes crawled round moaning, and even before he had come near enough to distinguish them, he recognized the sickly sweet smell. He spurred on his horse to cross the clearing; a chorus of wailings answered the hoofbeats, mutilated arms stretched out to him, and all around him ghostly faces grimaced, calling from horrible mouths.

He cursed, drove his horse towards the fire, to force it over; then he stopped.

A woman in white had suddenly risen behind the flames. A white woman. Next to her was a man in white, kneeling by the side of a monster. The woman was very beautiful; her eyes looked at him kindly.

"What are you doing here?" he asked roughly, to defend himself against those eyes.

"Helping," the woman answered. She had a hoarse, low voice. Her companion stood up too, a man with sloping shoulders and a tired face, holding a mass of dirty bandages.

"Are you out of your minds?" he cried. "Do you know what you are doing?"

"Of course," the woman said. The man smiled and said nothing. The horse neighed, and from all sides mutilated bodies came crawling near in the flickering firelight.

"Who has given you permission?" he shouted. His horse reared. "Don't you know leprosy is infectious? What precautions have you taken?"

"None," the woman said. "God protects us."

"Is that so?" he asked mockingly, suddenly sure of himself, for he had seen her hands. "Then let me tell you that your God has fooled you, for you have it, my dear." He said it with a wide, fatherly smile. But as he stared intently into her eyes, waiting for the fear he knew so well, the fear that never failed to appear, his smile slowly disappeared, and he was overcome by a growing amazement, an incredulity, that became a feeling of emptiness.

For she went on looking at him calmly, without batting an eyelid, and the kindness in her eyes deepened to pity. Never before had anyone looked at him like that, with such compassion; yet he was

convinced she could not have known the truth, so slight were the signs of the white death.

" Yes . . ." he said, a last defence against the void growing inside him, " you have leprosy! " He pointed at the lepers, crawling nearer. " You'll be like them! God knows how long it will take before He puts an end to you—maybe thirty years! "

When she still gave no sign of terror, still looked at him with that terrible, tender strength, he dismounted, turned her towards the fire, took her hands, opened them, closed them, looked up, and asked, " Who are you? "

The man answered, " Salvationists," and his voice broke on the word.

A hand pulled at his trouser leg; he saw the stump of an arm creep up her skirt; without a word he turned away, to remount and flee back into the night. But the feeling of emptiness made him feel so lost and helpless that he turned round again, and went back to the woman who had bent down once more over the most horrible suffering in the world. He stood watching her for a long time, but she did not look up. Then he took a bandage out of a basket standing by the fire, and started a new, bewildering life by bandaging some fingerless hand.

Often during the years that followed, he asked himself what exactly had happened that night. Something had happened, because he had been unable to take up his old life again. He gave up drinking and playing poker; he went through a change of morals that made the others first gape in surprise and then bellow with laughter; they called it a grotesque conversion. He alone knew that it was not a conversion at all, but something else, something to do with her, not with God or his soul.

He was unable to leave her; something drew him back to her that was stronger than his sense of shame, his urge for freedom and self-preservation. He worked, pleaded, intrigued, fought for them with much more doggedness than he had ever fought for his own sake. He pestered the Head of the Service and the government relentlessly, trying to get a sanatorium for their patients. At last, after more than a year, the harassed authorities granted them an old military hospital somewhere in the mountains in Java, a scandalous place, two centuries old, that had been a fortress, a prison, and an army hospital, abandoned by the army because the prisoners went mad and the patients died of a mysterious fever. The clubs and the passangrahans buzzed with funny stories about Brits-Jansen the Holy Roller, the Latter Day Saint.

It dawned on him that he had been granted the hospital as a practical joke. Everybody was waiting for the wonderful moment when Brits-Jansen, who had crashed through the sinners' bench when kneeling down and who took his teeth out to pray, would go for the C.O. Java with his double-barrelled gun. Willem and Betsy were so happy with their Black Hole of Calcutta, the temple God had given them in His mercy. He feared the worst, yet

helped them to fit out their hospital. He saw to it that they got instruments, drugs, beds, kitchen utensils, male nurses, patients. He took off his topi at the first holiness meeting, hummed tunelessly with their odd, happy songs, and suddenly stopped humming at the calm question in his thoughts: what the hell am I doing here? Then he shrugged his shoulders and hummed on.

The impossible succeeded. The fortress, which for two hundred years had been a monument to human cruelty, became the first leper colony in the archipelago, a model of its kind. Once they could do without him, a feeling of resentment had grown inside him: they ought to be damned grateful for everything he had done for them, and, quite frankly, he was getting a bit sick of their irritating cheerfulness. Then he learnt that they had a child of sixteen months, that it had been three months old when they were forced to send it away, after he had told her she had leprosy. She mentioned it casually, while the orchestra of lepers was playing at the funeral of a limbless trunk called Pa-Kromo.

It was a girl, she said—Bertha. She was now in a Salvation Army home in Holland, and they would probably never see her again. Then the trumpets blared the triumphantly unharmonious final chord of *When the roll is called up yonder*, and the trumpeters, pressing down the stops with sticks because their fingers had become too short, had tears in their eyes at their own beautiful sound.

He did not breathe a word to them about it, but that day he started his battle with God. God Who had promised to protect His servants, and Who had smitten with leprosy the most wonderful woman in the world. Brits-Jansen specialized in leprosy with a vindictiveness that gave him, within a year, the reputation of a maniac all over the archipelago. He hunted lepers everywhere, travelled for weeks to look at a special case; he sent his colleagues begging letters, beseeching them to collect all interesting specimens they could find and keep them until he arrived. He fitted out a laboratory within the walls of the fortress, and every day, every hour he could spare from his heavy duties, he worked there, mumbling, sweating, a staggering giant in the harsh glare of hissing oil lamps, until he fell asleep at the breakfast table and snored during grace.

Every leave he got, sometimes just a single night as he was passing through, he wrestled there with God, like Jacob in the desert. But at the end of each year, he had to look back on a series of lost battles, and add another defeat to her case history.

During the first years of this gigantic duel, he sometimes asked himself whether it was love that had made him attack leprosy with such ferocity; whether he had challenged God only out of frustrated desire. But if this was love, it was different from what he had always known it to be, for the thought of holding her in his arms was unbearable, and made him hide his face in his hands with shame. Women to him were a luxury, like expensive beer or a really good game of billiards. He had a woman occasionally, but they were mostly one-night affairs.

Breszezinska-Jansen was the foremost leprosy specialist—it was

nobody's business that he was battling with God for a mutilated woman lying in a mosquito-tent somewhere on a mountain on an island called Java. The Head of the Service, who had once been his assistant, sometimes asked him why he refused promotion, why he insisted on wasting his time as a volunteer for expeditions against plague, dysentery, and cholera in outlying parts of the jungle where a young nonentity might have done just as well. Brits-Jansen would laugh and shrug his shoulders; his embarrassment would be hidden by his beard. For who would understand that he was on a lifelong pilgrimage in search of someone he knew he would never find, and yet went on expecting with foolish hope at each bend of the road? Someone—saint, hermit, or lunatic—who would know the answer to this question: how was it that in a room on a mountain in Java, a blind, mutilated woman could lie dying in a blaze of glory, while he, the giant, slowly sank into a morass of despair?

The next morning, he was up at sunrise. His plan of campaign was simple and he was certain of the outcome; the only depressing element in the situation was the lack of P.G. He would have to get this campaign over very quickly indeed.

The splitting-up of the village into sectors of dying, ill, and healthy was basically a simple operation; a trained dog could have done it. But as always the emotional element was his main obstacle; the natives stuck together in family groups. He was glad when, after three hours of screams, tears, and futile fights, he could leave the rest to his mandur and the male nurses; for it was nearly eleven o'clock, and he had a date with the Sultan.

He went to his tent to change his clothes; he could not go and see the Sultan in flea-boots and rubber gloves, his white coat splashed with blood and mud. But after he had taken off his gloves and opened the chest in which his white drill was packed, a thought struck him. He remembered waking up the morning after the banquet, thirty years ago, in the Sultan's bed; the most memorable thing about the Sultan's bed was that it had been alive with fleas. Small wonder; many more generations of fleas than of men must have bred and lived in the palace. And it would not surprise him if the whole building was just a roof on a vast, intricate fortress of zigzagging tunnels: rats.

Plague had come to Rauwatta before; it was the only spot in Borneo where plague occurred; it might well be that the explanation was an enormous colony of rats, living underneath the palace. He would have to go very easy with the Sultan this morning, and placate him as much as he could; for if his conclusion about the rats was right, there was only one solution if he wanted to finish off the plague in Rauwatta once and for all. He would have to burn down the village and blow up the palace.

So he did not change. He only put on a clean white coat. When he presented himself at the palace gate he was struck by an eerie atmosphere. He had to wait a long time before tired shuffling steps dragged themselves across the courtyard. As the gate swung

open, creaking on wooden hinges, and he entered the courtyard, he saw still bodies lying everywhere in sleeping positions. No wonder he had felt uneasy; everybody he passed on his way to the Sultan was dead. The man who had opened the gate was the Master of Ceremonies himself. The Master of Ceremonies tottered and giggled like a drunk; once the Master of Ceremonies lay down, he would never get up again.

Something had to be done about this palace, and quickly.

When he entered the dark room, the Sultan was playing billiards, an old dwarf with a cue. Time had certainly taken its toll of him; his face looked like a withered apple mummified in a draughty loft. Either Rahula Rattan Rauwari had shrunk with the passing years, or he himself had grown, which seemed unlikely. He had grown only in circumference, whereas the Sultan had diminished in stature, for he could barely peep over the billiard table any more.

" I see you, sire," Brits-Jansen said, bowing with a rustle of starched linen, and a plopping sound as he bent his hip boots.

The Sultan did not look up. He peered along his cue, one eye shut, remained frozen for nearly a minute, then the cue flashed like the tongue of a snake, a white ball with a big blue spot whirled across the table, hit first the red and then the other white one. Both vanished into the pockets at the corners, then the spotted ball rolled slowly back towards the Sultan, like a rolling eye, until it came to rest in exactly the same spot from where he had shot it.

Brits-Jansen raised his eyebrows and whistled. " Hot shot, sire," he said, with genuine admiration. " Let's have a game tonight."

Only then the Sultan looked up. His black eyes looked his visitor over slowly, from the boots upward, until their eyes met. Brits-Jansen's smile became formal, then vanished altogether. He didn't like the look the Sultan gave him; it set an alarm bell ringing somewhere.

" I see you, Sappo-lidi," the Sultan said softly.

Brits-Jansen did not lose any time beating about the bush. " Sire," he said, " if you want to stay alive, you're in for a move. I won't trouble you with details, but the black sickness is carried by fleas, and the fleas are carried by rats. If you want me to kill the black sickness, I'll have to kill the rats first, then the fleas. You've got a lot of both."

The Sultan lowered his eyelids, a proud demonstration of modesty.

" Sultan has lot of everything," he said.

" Except subjects," Brits-Jansen added, " and at this rate Sultan won't have any left at all a moon from now. What would Sultan be without subjects? "

Rahula Rattan Rauwari raised his snakelike eyelids again, looked at his guest with an absent-minded gaze, and answered, " Sultan would be happy. Sultan not like subjects; Sultan like billiards and Her Majesty Queen."

" That, I am sure, is mutual," Brits-Jansen said, as a sudden brilliant idea crossed his mind. " I am sure that Her Majesty the

Queen would be delighted to meet Sultan again and talk about old times. Would Sultan be agreeable to that?"

Rahula Rattan Rauwari stood thinking for a long time, holding his cue, an old dwarf with a lance. Then he answered, "No."

"Come, come," said Brits-Jansen, "you don't mean that. Think of all the wonderful things you could do in Holland. I know of a club in Holland where there are fifty billiard tables, side by side . . ."

"Sultan not want fifty billiard tables," the little man said deliberately. "Sultan likes only one table—this one."

Brits-Jansen sighed, shoved back his topi, and scratched his head. "All right," he said, "if that's the way you want it, sire, you leave me no choice. I've come to tell you that you'll have to be out of this palace by tomorrow night."

"Why?" asked the Sultan quietly.

"Because I'm going to blow it up," Brits-Jansen said.

"Aah . . .?" said the Sultan, a long, melodious sound of mock wonder. "Perhaps Sappo-lidi also going to catch moon? Pick stars from river and feed them to big god-crocodile, yes?"

"No good baby-talking to me, sire," Brits-Jansen said, with a beginning of exasperation. "I hate to remind you, but I represent your government. Your government tells you with my voice that you'll have to be out of your palace by tomorrow night, or I'll have to blow it up with you inside. Is that clear?"

Then the Sultan smiled. It was a disturbing smile, for he had no teeth left and his pink tongue lived inside the leathery cave of his mouth like a shellfish. "Quite clear," he said, with a disturbing imitation of coyness. "Sappo-lidi—cuckoo!" At this, he made a weird little gesture with his hand by the side of his temple and added soothingly, as to a child, "Let's play little game. Yes?"

Brits-Jansen did some rapid thinking. The old man was too cunning by half. Of course he couldn't blow up the palace without the Sultan's permission, and the Sultan knew it. He had never cared about the red tape the Government had tried to tie him up in for thirty years, but there were limits. To a colonial official's mind, it was quite acceptable that Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari should perish with his entire population in an outbreak of the plague; that his life could be saved by blowing up his palace was beyond their comprehension. Somehow he would have to trick the old man into giving his permission. He said, "Tonight, sire, I'll be delighted to give you a game; now I have other things to do. Would you allow my men to come into your palace and take out the corpses, please?"

"No," said the Sultan, "Sultan will not, Sultan wants to keep corpses and weep over old friends."

You old bastard, Brits-Jansen thought, but he smiled the beaming smile of the humble civil servant and said, "Just as you wish, sire. I only wanted to protect you against the black sickness." The smile had come the readier, because a splendid solution had struck him. With all those corpses lying about, Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari

would very probably be a corpse himself within the next ten days.

As if the old man had read his thoughts, he smiled in return. " Sultan not afraid of black sickness," he said. " Sultan immature."

" Is that so? " Brits-Jansen said, baffled for the first time. " In that case, so long, sire. See you tonight." He turned and strode out authoritatively, through the wrong doorway, suppressed a cry when he saw a dead child's body with a bloated belly lying on the vast Victorian bed. Then he realized that it was a lute, went back into the billiard room, said to the Sultan, who was peering once more along his cue, " The word is ' immune,' " and walked out.

The sunlight hit him like the flash of an explosion. He had to stand still for a while, slowly opening his eyes, to get accustomed to the glare. As he stood there, the smell of the corpses sickened him. He wondered how the Sultan could stand it. He considered, for a mad moment, the possibility that the old man had some anti-plague vaccine hidden away. But he dismissed the thought with a shrug; anti-plague vaccine only lasted a couple of months here.

As he opened the gate and stepped into the village square, he was fighting a short inward battle with his civil-servant's conscience. He ought to give Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari an anti-plague injection. During the first ten days it gave a greater susceptibility. No civil servant on God's earth could blame him for giving Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari an anti-plague injection; it was the responsible thing to do. He could give him an intravenous anti-plague injection, which was the surest way of killing anybody.

Suddenly he was struck by the violence of the solutions he was considering. It was like killing a sparrow with a blunderbuss. Never before had he thought so long and so emotionally about the passive resistance of a native ruler. So he came to the surprising conclusion that he must be fond of the old man; for in normal circumstances it would never have occurred to him.

As he sat down to the frugal lunch his mandur had prepared, he took his three c.c. of P.G. absent-mindedly. He thought about friendship and what it meant to old people; he concluded that it was a matter of time, the result of a process of elimination. The Sultan and he were the only ones still alive from those old, wild days; they had been enemies for so long that now they had become fond of one another. To old people, it was the relationship itself that mattered, not its nature. When his coffee was served, he drank it noisily, deep in nostalgic thoughts; and when he sucked the drops out of his moustache, he had found the solution to the problem of the gaudy palace.

He would play billiards with Rahula Rattan Rauwari with the palace as a stake, win, clean out the plague, and take the old man home.

After he had lain down for his nap and closed his eyes, his thoughts became vague and silly. He would take the Sultan with him on his expeditions. They would take a small-size billiard table with them, with folding legs, like a camp table. Or an even smaller one, as big as a tray, with ping-pong balls. Then he pictured to

himself the smallest billiard table in the world: as big as a matchbox with rabbit shot for balls and toothpicks for cues. While they played, kneeling with their heads close together like two children peering at a miniature tortoise, he fell asleep.

He arrived back at the palace that night well rested, washed from head to foot, dressed in crackling white, and feeling on top of the world. That afternoon, his men had finished dividing the natives over the sectors and he had injected anti-plague into the healthy ones. Now his coolies were busy building the laboratory, a bit of nonsense really, but it was always better to have a close look at the nature of a local plague germ. That was how great discoveries were made. If Eykman hadn't sat staring for days on end at his chickens pecking at rice, he would never have found the cure for beri-beri.

He had sent his mandur into the sector of the dying to collect some nice fat fleas and tomorrow he would start staring at them as Eykman had stared at his chickens. Now he was looking forward to the game of billiards, and proud of the solution he had found.

" I see you, sire," he said jauntily, as he entered the vault where the Sultan stood waiting behind the billiard table, amidst the dried heads of former opponents and the smoking torches.

" I see you, Sappo-lidi," the Sultan said.

" Yes," said Brits-Jansen, taking off his topi and hanging it on one of the heads. " Let's face it. We see one another through and through." Then he rubbed his gloved hands; he wasn't going to take those gloves off, even if it cost him a few points. Then he put his proposition to the Sultan.

He had been prepared for a struggle, but the old man simply said, " I agree. If Sappo-lidi wins, palace—bang. Affoo." And with that word, which thirty years ago Brits-Jansen had recognized as " A vous," the game started.

After his first shot, with which he scored nothing, Brits-Jansen realized that the gloves made delicate playing impossible. The cue squeaked between his rubber fingers and the ball behaved oddly; it darted off at an unexpected angle. While the Sultan was quietly piling up points with a series of master strokes that made him frown with wonder and whistle with polite admiration, he fought an inward battle which ended with his taking off the gloves. It was essential that he should win this game. The fate of Rauwatta depended on it.

During the first hour of the match, he still thought piously of the fate of Rauwatta. After that he forgot about Rauwatta and thought of winning only. For that little runt, that old monkey from the jungle, went quietly on performing miracles on the baize, while he himself played like a drunken farmer in a pool-room. Heaven knows what was the matter with those balls; they seemed to have stopped obeying the laws of physics and darted about in a crazy pattern, as if under the spell of black magic. It was infuriating, it was more than that, it was a tragedy. Never in his life had he played so badly,

and never had he played against an opponent of such dazzling skill.

He called to aid all his shrewdest stratagems. He sweated, panted, cursed in his beard, leaned backward over the table, the cue behind him, leaned over the edge with one leg stuck out, the cue perpendicular, his beard touching the baize. He lost the buttons of his coat, his rubber boots filled with perspiration. In the end, he forgot all about the fleas, ripped open his collar, growled, took aim, blinded by sweat, stabbed; the ball swirled halfway across the table, made a little jump, and missed once more. He shook his cue at the ceiling, then put it down with a crash.

The old dwarf, saintly and unruffled, stood chalking his cue with a soft, squeaking sound. Only then, while glaring at his tiny opponent, did Brits-Jansen realize that this was the revenge. For thirty years Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari had practised billiards every day, waiting for Sappo-lidi's return in order to get even with him: this was the return match for the slap on the buttocks, the fat boy's arrogance, the banquet.

They played on until the dawn. By then, Brits-Jansen had not a single button left on his coat, one of his boots had sagged down to his calf, his beard dripped with perspiration, his eyes were blood-shot with rage. When at last the match ended, after the Sultan had won his thirty-eighth game, Sappo-lidi roared, broke his cue across his knee, and threw the two halves at the mocking heads on the wall.

" Tea? " the Sultan asked, his head on one side.

Brits-Jansen glowered at him; his huge hands opened and shut; then he said, " God knows I'm a man of my word, but today, at twelve noon sharp, I'm going to blow up this palace and this goddamn table with it."

" Why table? " the Sultan asked, politely amazed.

" Because it's full of rats! " Brits-Jansen shouted, and then he was overcome by shame. He wiped his brow with the sleeve of his coat which was already soaked, and said, " All right, tea."

The Sultan clapped his hands, then started putting the cues and the balls away while he waited for the slave to appear. He put everything away neatly, but by the time he had finished no slave had come. It gave Brits-Jansen a small satisfaction. He clapped his hands himself; the claps rang out like pistol shots in the echoing vault; they would have wakened the heaviest sleeper.

As still no one appeared, he said, pleased, " All right, no tea."

The Sultan said nothing.

" Well, now," Brits-Jansen went on, " you have had your little moment, now let's talk like adults. If I tell you that it is necessary to set fire to the palace if we want to defeat the black sickness, do you believe me? "

" Oh yes," said the Sultan.

" All right, then. When? "

The Sultan smiled and shook his head. " Never," he said. " Black sickness been here many times. It will pass."

Brits-Jansen said, " Listen, sire. Let's get this straight. I don't

care a damn whether you die of the plague, old age, or murder. If you make it impossible for me to do my job properly by refusing to let me get at the heart of the black sickness underneath this very floor, I'll call it a day and go home."

" In what? " the Sultan asked, smiling.

" Well, in my bo . . ." His mouth remained open as it dawned on him, at last, why he had heard himself hum *Auld Lang Syne* as he stood looking at the funeral pyre in the village square of Rauwatta. The Javanese students, whom he had ordered to burn the boats, had burnt all of them.

Sultan Rahula Rattan Rauwari smiled triumphantly. " Sappolidi no go home," he said. " Sultan lonely; Sultan play billiards with Sappo-lidi for ever, all day, until last darkness."

" Like hell you will," Brits-Jansen said; but he felt suddenly tired, an old man.

It was three o'clock in the morning, but the lamp in the doctor's tent was still burning. At his camp table, Dr. Breszezinska-Jansen, G.H.S., sat writing; an empty tin of P.G. lay on the floor. He wrote, *Recent experience has suggested to me a necessary addition to Chapter* 11, *paragraph* 1, *page* 289, *third line from the bottom, in Eykman's* Vade Mecum. *The paragraph in question runs: " As a first measure to localize an epidemic, all communications should be blockaded or, if possible, cut off. In the case of communication by water, all prahus and rafts should be destroyed by fire." I suggest the addition of the words: " except one."*

Then he picked up from the floor the tin of Pure Gin and shook it above his beaker; nothing came out. He cursed and threw it through the opening into the night, forgetting about the mosquito-curtain. The tin came back with a clatter and he kicked it underneath the bunk. Then he wrote, on a page torn out of his journal.

He called, " Mandur," folded the letter, and wrote the address on the outside in three languages, with the addition *Urgent and Secret*. It would be several weeks before his assistant was due to arrive with relief supplies, and though he preferred to handle this independently, prudence dictated a more urgent summons: besides, he had run out of P.G.

The mandur appeared and bowed, unsteady with sleep. " Pick out your best man and have him carry this through the forest to Rokul," Brits-Jansen said.

" Saja, tuan besar," said the mandur. Then, at last, the lamp in the doctor's tent went out.

The first thing the doctor saw the next morning was the mandur's best man: trussed like a pig, hanging from a stake, carried by two of the Sultan's warriors.

So that was that.

★ ★ ★

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

Nasty Night

Picabia's château was charming. Everything was quite informal . . . And how pleasant the bedrooms were! There was the sailor's room, the wild man's room, the room of the lady of 1840, and the children's room, which was adorned with Negro masks and suits of armour, and furnished with cannons, all the paraphernalia of witchcraft, and instruments of torture. Every night a mechanical ghost went the rounds, twitching the sheets and rattling chains. "I designed it like that," the artist explained, "because I wanted to train the children from childhood to be quite fearless. When they get a bit older, I shall replace the ghost with a creditor waving an unpaid bill."

MICHEL GEORGES-MICHEL

Before George Winterville died,
He took his stick in hand,
And we walked out behind his cow.
As she made her dignified way
Among the buttercups,
He told me exactly how
The roads in Ireland ran:
" Like spokes spun out,"
He said, " from the squire."
The squire being his grandfather,
George was welcomed at every cottage,
Given bread and honey
By barefoot little girls like me.
Then he explained precisely,
And in nice detail,
How the Devil nightly
Sat on his bedpost, saying,
" I'm waiting for you, George."

SHIRLEY GUMINA, *The Friends*

CHOICE OF WEAPONS

The equation was deadly clear—
a gun against a hand

BY WILLIAM FAY

THE sporting types came early, if clandestinely, to the appointed place of battle. There was no evidence that the police had been informed. Many of the crowd had made the narrow crossing from New Jersey, while others had journeyed the longer way, by barge and tow, from old Manhattan, across the waters of the Upper Bay. A cool wind washed the Staten Island shore, and hearts grew rapid as the time of action crowded near.

"Here's the Tinsmith now!" somebody shouted.

The great one whom the followers of the "Fancy" most admired—the heavy-walking man they called the Tinsmith—came from the fringe of the forest, dressed in long tights from his waist to his fighting shoes, his great chest bared to the rising wind, his derby still on his head. He stepped into the roped square where the battle would be made. He rolled his great hands into fists.

"Three cheers for the Tinsmith!" a thousand men called lustily. "Three cheers for the winner of many a mill!"

This was the way that those most faithful to the Tinsmith always cheered him. A warrior of dignity, he acknowledged their goodwill. He bowed, raising his derby with that flair for courtesy for which he was well known. It was the spring of 1886—a gracious and a cultivated time when fighting with fists, for cash or for a prize, was forbidden by law. It was especially diverting for this reason to have the Tinsmith raising his hands against a reckless youth who was a New York City policeman.

"Hogan!" the Tinsmith's seconds began to complain. "Where is Hogan?"

"I'm over here," the young man said.

"Then, come on, man! Come now!"

"I'm in no hurry," Dan Hogan, the policeman, said. "Why should a man be in a hurry to have the brains crushed in his head?"

"That's no spirit at all, lad," he was cautioned.

"Well," said Hogan, "whose head is it, yours or mine?"

He walked indolently from the barge to the level beyond the shoreline where the ring was pitched. He held a heavy blanket around himself and he laughed when they said he looked more like a horse or a wild, crazy Indian than a fighting man. He was twenty-three years old and had been appointed a Bowery constable through a Tammany Hall wangle.

It was said with some accuracy that this Hogan was a lad who knew how to take care of himself. The Tinsmith, standing in the ring, looked perplexed and cold.

"Into the ring with you now, Hogan!"

"Just a minute, please," the lad said. "Don't be pushing an officer of the law. I have a little money of my own and I would like to place a bet."

Unlike the Tinsmith, he did not wear the scars of his avocation. When he smiled, the effect was disarming. He gazed now towards the barge where a group of gamblers were unblushingly waving their money.

"What are the odds?" he asked. And the word came back: "It's four to one the Tinsmith smashes you, lad."

"Then I suggest that you gentlemen come forward with your money," Hogan said.

On the far side of the inlet, where the small boat had been moored, the girl was waiting. Restlessly every now and then she would pace the narrow strip of sand with stylish grace, raising all three petticoats from the ground. A small man with a twisted nose sat on a stone nearby. Once, dramatically, he spat tobacco juice at a horseshoe crab.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he said to the girl, "for missing the ugly creature."

Her name was Mary Richards, and she smiled, but she didn't reply. He noted how she held the lace kerchief a bit too tightly in her hands. She was about nineteen. Her hair was the colour of the melting sky. She had the posture of a queen and it was fitting that she should become the bride of Hogan.

"I will say this for you, ma'am: you brought your courage with you," the small man said.

"Thank you, Ned. It may be that I'll need it."

"Not that your father would hurt a hair of his own blood daughter, but believe me, ma'am, and heaven help us all, what he wouldn't do to young Hogan, if he knew the thing you planned."

Mary Richards nodded solemnly. She had stopped her restless pacing. "Ned," she asked, "do you think we'll like it in the west—Dan and I?"

Ned Deever looked puzzled. "I dunno. I understand the women have the vote in Wyoming now, which only goes to show that it must be a highly uncivilized place. No offence meant, ma'am, but it's the damndest thing I ever heard. The vote for women and whisky for the Indians. Why should a territory like that one expect to become a state?"

Mary laughed. "Have you ever been to Wyoming, Ned?"

"No, ma'am. Only to California, by ship that time. I was there with Dan two years ago—him as much an easterner as me. It seems they were all out of gold, so he comes home and gets into the cops."

"Was Dan—well, was he fighting then?"

"Not in a serious way, ma'am. Only thing I remember is he sparred a few rounds with a young bank clerk named Corbett—just for the sport of it, mind you, with gloves, and while I might be prejudiced about Dan, it was hard to tell which lad was quicker with his hands—him or this Corbett."

The first great roar of the crowd came to them from a quarter of a mile away. The girl's face paled, her eyes flashed with alarm.

"Does that mean they're fighting now, Ned?"

"Yes," he said, "they're at it now—as sure as your father is Commissioner of Police."

He watched this girl shrewdly and was pleased with what he saw. She was taking punishment, no doubt of that, but she would not be found wanting in a time of trial.

"Why," she demanded, "did he have to fight a man as powerful as this one?"

"For money," Ned Deever said calmly. "It's such a useful thing for a bridegroom to have, ma'am, when he's running off with a girl like yourself that's had all the advantages. Would you want him to be what your father already has called him—a worthless and penniless rogue?"

"I never asked that he be rich, Ned, and I'd rather have him penniless than senseless." She stopped then, for the crowd roar swelled anew and shook the forest behind them. Only the waters of the bay were calm. The small boat drifted at anchor.

"The difference between us, ma'am," Ned Deever said, "is that you never saw Dan Hogan fight."

In the Territory of Wyoming, where the women voted, and the cattle, in the good years, grazed as plump as a bunch of politicians, it could be said with truth that no one within a thousand miles had ever seen Dan Hogan fight. This was a peculiar thing, in fighting country. Most people had grown to like Dan Hogan in the year and more he had been here. Still you could not avoid

the feeling that any ranchman in the prime of life who didn't carry side-arms in the year of '87 was either a misplaced person or a man afraid of a fight.

There'd been a fellow named Deever, a small man with a twisted nose who, when he was drinking, had told fanciful, unlikely stories of this mild man from the east—how he could hit you as fast with either hand as a bobcat could with its paws, but that was just saloon talk, anyhow; folks out here didn't fight with their fists and God had yet to make the man whose hands were as fast as a Colt .44. This fellow Deever, a funny kind, had gone back home, lonesome for the Bowery, he had said, and for the kind of beer, chilled in the keg, that a man couldn't get west of Chicago or east of Frisco.

"Good afternoon, Dan."

"Afternoon, Sheriff," Hogan said.

He no longer looked like an easterner. The sun had fried the pink Irish look right out of him and painted the exposed parts of his skin mahogany. The boots he wore raised his natural six foot just a little closer to the sky. He stood with the sheriff in the dust of the late day, making small talk outside the sprawling, log-cabin saloon known as the Cattleman's Rest.

Sheriff Manion's thought right now was that this man, so popular in town, was tailor-made for the office of deputy—and, heaven knows, help was badly needed. But then you looked at his lean hips and the absence of side-arms and you concluded, naturally, that this was no fighting man at all; hell, this was not even a man prepared to protect himself or his own.

"How's the wife, Dan?"

"She's real fine, Sheriff. Happy as flies on a sugar mule."

"And the youngster?"

"He's comin' along," Dan said. "He was six months old the other day. We put him on a grain scale and he pushed it up to twenty pounds."

"You like it here, Dan, don't you?"

"Well, what do you think?" the big man said.

It was a funny thing about this mild and unarmed rancher from the east. He'd tell you straight to your face that up until some fourteen months ago all he had known about beef was what he had learnt with a knife and fork. But it made you wonder why, of all the ranchers in this part of the Territory, only Hogan had been able to coast undamaged through the killing winter of '86–'87. Some said it was because his herd had been small and capable of survival; besides, they said, he'd had the damfool luck to have on hand just hay enough to keep meat on their bones till spring, then watch the price of beef go higher than a gas balloon.

Sheriff Manion, however, with a few other people, had an idea it was not all pure luck.

" Hyman Ranse was out your way last week, Dan? "

" Who? "

" Ranse—Hyman Ranse," the sheriff repeated. " The real big feller from Cheyenne. I heard for sure he was out there. He wanted to get his hands on a few little items of yours. I'm right about that, Dan? "

" You could be right, Sheriff. Matter of fact, he wanted to buy a bull I got—a bull named Tammany Hall, and a couple of special cows. He offered a nice price, Sheriff."

" And what'd you say? "

" I said no. I told him how it was with Tammany Hall; that he's a good stock bull with a lot of rabbit in his heart and that we have to think of future generations."

" Did he like it? "

" No," said Hogan, " he didn't like it. It seems his own herds took hard punishment last winter. He's a real possessive man."

" Did he threaten you, Dan? "

" Now, Sheriff, please—let's not get talkin' foolishness. You know I never argue with anyone out here. All you people got those great big firin' rods and I'm afraid of them."

" Is that why you don't carry one, Dan? "

" That's right, sir."

" And what other reason? "

" Maybe the other reason is that I wouldn't like shootin' people any more than I would like to have them shootin' me."

" You've got a family to protect," he was reminded.

" I know that, sir. I know that very well. Let me stand you a drink."

The sheriff said no, not today. The sheriff, like the county doctor, had his everlasting rounds to make. This town one day, another the next, until the whole wide county had been covered, and nothing, absolutely nothing, accomplished.

" Can't stay long enough in one place to get my shirt washed or to shoot a mad dog," Manion complained. " I could use a man like you, Dan, as a kind of deputy, if you wasn't so damned scared of guns. I've got a few men in the other towns."

" I'd be the wrong man, Sheriff."

" That's what I was thinking," the older man said sadly. " Folks like you, Dan, but the question is, do they respect you? "

Manion left him then and Hogan watched the stage-coach make the last trip out of town. The day had run most of its length. The sky was like strawberry pie, the distant hills were blue. A low wind bent the tall grass for a hundred miles around, sweeping

its sweetness over the town. It was almost too nice an evening for a man to have a drink, but sociability seemed to demand it. He walked into the Cattleman's Rest.

" Dan'l, my lad! " the bartender greeted him.

It was nice to be known by so many, Dan thought, and better still to be liked. He sipped one finger of whisky at the bar, foregoing his usual warm orange squash, a concoction that made the bartender wince and had almost driven Ned Deever out of his mind. Dan, of course, missed Deever, as did most of those who had known him at all.

" Nice evening outside, Dan'l? "

" It's real nice, George. There's a breeze like lilacs."

" Not in here there isn't."

Dan didn't mind. The stale heat of the afternoon hung heavy in the rafters. It made you sweat while you were standing still. It made you bless the breadth and freedom of the out-of-doors. Yet there was sociability to make the night worth while. There was ranchman's talk and condemnation of the sheepmen everywhere. A dozen card games, big and small, were under way.

Dan saw Hyman Ranse, the cattle speculator, sitting in the biggest of the games, driving his luck like a tired herd, pressing and pressing, forcing the pace. Dan wandered into the circle of idle spectators. It was easy to see that Ranse played well. When the cards came in wretched combinations, he read them skilfully, then played with shrewd daring. It was a five-handed game of five-card draw, and it was simple to see that two of the players were out of their depth—afraid not only of Hyman Ranse, but of his cash resources as well.

A rancher named Shields, a slender, quiet man whom Dan knew fairly well, seemed equal to the challenge of Ranse's skill. Dan walked round and looked without comment at his hand, precisely as he had at the hands of others in the game.

" Evening, Dan," said Shields, not looking up.

" Evening, Clint." Dan gazed at Shield's hand with legitimate curiosity.

" Let the man play his own cards," Hyman Ranse said crisply. His glance met Hogan's and it held no compromise, nor any sign of friendliness.

" I don't think he needs help," Dan said quietly.

The moment passed and Dan's thoughts moved beyond the caprices of the game being played. His own experience was that the west had been friendly, if blunt, and he had no complaint against the majority of ruggedly frank yet decent men with whom he had been dealing. But Hyman Ranse?

" Your deal, Shields," Ranse said coolly.

It was hard to explain how a man could be offensive making a statement this plain. A funny thing, Dan thought, how Manion, the sheriff, had first brought up, then pressed the subject of this man. There had been trouble the other day; there'd been Ranse's greed for the things that Dan possessed. Ranse had not enjoyed the experience of finding his money ignored. There'd been words, too—not such a hellish lot of words, but more than Dan had told Manion.

Hogan, with his thoughts absorbed by these recollections of Ranse, was never sure how the crisis had bloomed and come to flower in the fetid air of the Cattleman's Rest. He simply knew that silence had fallen, as heavy as damped-down dust, and that the nervous, high-pitched, yet unintimidated voice of Shields was responding to some kind of ultimatum. The words themselves demanded a decision:

"Do what you like about it, Mr. Ranse. I played it my way, and to hell with you, Mr. Ranse."

The hair began to rise on Hogan's neck. The atmosphere was a thing to be sensed, far more than understood. Hogan's heart, a sentimental organ at any time, automatically went out to Shields, who sat pale-faced and sweating, yet, in his way, unflinching, facing Ranse across the table.

The moment was here and there was no way now to buy it back. The thump of an old clock filled the high, bare building with a strange throb of its own; the clock was like a heartbeat; men were still. Ranse shoved the table violently against Shields's chest and with the same fluid motion came to his feet. His hand reached for his gun.

Hogan had known that Shields would not have a chance. His own response was instantaneous, without thought or plan. He simply chopped with his fist in a lightning stroke at Ranse's jaw, sending the man and chair and half-drawn .44 their separate ways.

Ranse landed on his back, the sawdust sticking to the fine silk shirt he wore. His huge hands clawed with hunger for the gun no longer in his grasp. His eyes were heavy with hate. The corners of his mouth were puffed with froth.

Dan knew instinctively that there could be no easy exit from the situation. He stepped between his victim and the fallen .44. "I don't like guns, Mr. Ranse. They're much too dangerous. They frighten me."

The blood came in a thin stream now from Ranse's mouth. Behind his wrath, bewilderment was rising. He was not sure how he had been hit, or by what lightning instrument.

Hogan obligingly tapped his own right hand with the fingers of his left. "I'm really sorry, Mr. Ranse," he said, then walked

to the bar, aware that, while he remained unarmed and had a hundred witnesses, he would not be shot in the back. He took three fingers of whisky and felt its burning glow in his chest. He tried not to cough from the unaccustomed strength of it. He smiled in amusement at the bartender's trembling hands.

Now men came cautiously his way, closing a tight circle around him, cutting him off from Ranse's view.

"You know what you done was stupid, don't you, Dan?"

"I suppose so, George."

The bartender looked like a man about to cry. He had a quick drink in support of his lagging spirit, then another. He raised the second drink in solemn ceremony.

"To you, Dan," George said woefully. "You had to pick on a man who could shoot lint off a blue serge suit. Well, you were a real nice feller. Here's to you an' your widow."

He did not drink alone.

Hyman Ranse pushed slowly through the crowd. His face was white, but not from fear. He placed a Colt .44 on the surface of the bar. His fingers had a loving touch for it.

"Wear one of these tomorrow," the cattleman recommended softly, "or take the four-o'clock stage out of town."

"And if I don't?" Dan said.

"Then armed, or unarmed, Hogan, I'll shoot you dead where I find you." He was a tall man, rangy and hard, with a moustache thin as a pencil line. "It's a way of life we've had out here for thirty years before you came," said Hyman Ranse. "It won't have changed by tomorrow."

Dan Hogan had never seen a dawn more beautiful, nor heard the tall grass whisper more endearingly. The time of comedy was over. There was no longer any point in pretending to Mary that Ranse's ultimatum had been delivered in rage and for that reason was not binding. They both knew better. The town had known it the night before. By this afternoon the whole wide county would know it.

Nor was there any sense in wishing Sheriff Manion would come back from Little Storm or Bruceville or whatever town was being graced with his authority. The fact was that a man like Manion dealt almost exclusively with thieves, pernicious drunks, bad Indians, and men who beat their wives. Personal affairs, such as Hogan's conflict with Hyman Ranse, were rarely if ever the subject of a sheriff's intervention. The code of the west was still a good bit stronger than a badge. Dan suddenly remembered what Manion had said: *Folks like you, Dan, but the question is, do they respect you?*

" They're insane," said Hogan, talking to himself.

He had been awake long before daylight. He had two reasons for resisting a gun-duel with a man like Hyman Ranse. The first was moral. He did not believe in murder, especially his own. Nor did he believe that men could long live separated from the decencies and the balance of law, leaving their decisions to the six-shooter. That would change and better years would come; meanwhile, he would like to live for a while.

His other reason—and the one that had amused him once, was the simple fact that, taking dead aim with a .44, he would be lucky if he hit a standing cow at twenty yards. He could remember sharing this grim joke with his friend Ned Deever. Shooting at bottles, old jugs, and a target the size of a horse, they had accepted the weight of the evidence: they were undoubtedly the two poorest shots in the west. He could remember Ned's final verdict: " You'd never have been a cop in New York, if you hadn't had influence."

It was not funny now.

Mary didn't speak of it through breakfast, though the fear was in her, deep and lively. That much he knew. A feeling of doom, expressed far more in mood than in words, had taken hold of the ranch-hands Dan employed. There were seven of them—rough, profane, ungifted, loyal. They took it for granted he'd be meeting Hyman Ranse that afternoon. It wasn't in them to believe that he would submit meekly with his wife and son, climb on the stage to Bruceville, Lonely Pasture, or Cheyenne. He was a man of stature, Hogan, whom they openly worshipped; the glumness of their mood was therefore in anticipation of his demise.

Then Mary asked the question she had for a whole night been afraid to ask. " What's it going to be, Dan? "

And he said to her simply, " There'll be no guns."

She fell against him, weeping, clinging to him. He wondered if her tears were being shed in gratitude or shame. Women were damned strange, vote or no vote, east or west, or anywhere. He didn't speak to her of what he had in mind, except to say: " Don't worry, I won't grovel at Ranse's feet."

Hogan drove the wagon into town at half past three in the afternoon. The team of blacks walked slowly, almost with exaggerated courtesy along the one big street of the town. They clomped the dry dust to the level of their flanks. Their handsome heads bobbed almost imperceptibly. The sky was the blue of faded jeans. There were puffy clouds no bigger than the beards of ancient men.

The stage was waiting.

"You got passengers, Dave!" somebody called.

It was no pleasure to the people of the town to see the luggage on the wagon. There were few derisive calls.

Hyman Ranse was waiting on the crude verandah of the Cattleman's Rest. He smoked a thin cigar and looked quite satisfied. The exposed part of his holstered .44 gleamed brightly. When he moved down off the porch into the sunlight you could see the silver of it spring to life like diamonds. He was a relaxed man—steady, sure.

Hogan stepped down to the dust of the wide street, giving his attention to the team. He led them into the shade. He made it clear that Mary and the child should not get down. He walked slowly up to Hyman Ranse. "I'll stand you a drink," he said.

The other man shrugged. "What have I got to lose? It's your money, Hogan. And we've got till four o'clock."

Half the town trailed after them into the huge saloon. Three or four of Hyman Ranse's men clung near. They wore a look of authority, as spanking new as their boss's victory over Hogan, as heady as the rich man's new prestige. The big clock over the bar declared the time: twenty minutes to four.

Ranse raised his glass. "Here's to you, Hogan. That stage gets mighty bumpy."

"That so?"

"After thirty or forty miles of it, you'll need more starch in your spine than you've got ordinarily."

One of Ranse's men cackled. Otherwise there was no sound. Too many people were embarrassed by the spectacle of Hogan's shame. The minute-hand of the big clock was not synchronized for gradual travel around the dial. It jerked ahead, as some clocks do, one digit at a time, with awesome sixty-second waits between.

It was suddenly thirteen minutes to four when Hogan said to Hyman Ranse, "What makes you so sure I'll be taking the stage?"

George, the bartender, said later on that you could have heard a cow fall through the skylight. Ranse's pleased expression turned to grimness. His eyes went swiftly, uncontrollably, to Hogan's waist. Dan patted the right rear pocket of his jeans.

"I'm naked," he said. He walked away, his broad back insolent.

The crowd fell back, permitting easy passage. Hyman Ranse walked after him with measured steps, the rise and fall of his high-heeled boots a rhythmic, deadly thing. In the open doorway, Hogan paused.

Outside now, in the wide street, word was already being passed excitedly that Hogan's back was up. He might not take that

stage-coach, after all. The faces of a hundred people found his own. There were women there and children, tight-lipped, whispering, watching him. There were older men whose eyes had seen more war and blood than it was good to remember.

Hendricksen, a mild man and a friend, spoke up. "Don't be a damned fool, Dan. Your luggage is on the racks already. You've got seven minutes, Dan."

"It's nice of you all to think of me," Hogan said.

The glare of the sun had gone from the street. The roofs of buildings opposite were catching the waning glow. A bird flew up from the eaves of the new post office. But even at this distance, you could hear the forward-thrusting of the clock.

"Six minutes, Dan."

I wonder, Hogan was thinking, is it an unlawful or an indecent thing for a man to use his brains?

He smiled, and those who watched him couldn't know the reason why. He never turned to look at Hyman Ranse. Let him wait and sweat until his nerves are screaming, Hogan had resolved. As the Tinsmith—heaven reward that proud, brave fighter with his fists—had waited naked in the cold, let Ranse wait now in heat and tumult.

Dan Hogan walked slowly back to the bar and Ranse watched his every step. The bartender's eyes were on the clock. His apron, in all its history, had never been as white as his face was.

"You're asking for it, Dan," George said. "He told you, didn't he, for Pete's sake, that he'd shoot you, armed or unarmed? You can't say that you haven't had fair warning, Dan."

Three minutes.

Men began to back away from the bar with nervous care. The semicircle of cleared space widened rapidly. The sweat ran down from under Ranse's hat, but he was ready.

George, the bartender, laid a revolver on the bar. "It's better than nothing, Dan," George's voice was queer and cracked. His nerves were springing like old piano wires. "Don't let him shoot you like a rattler, Dan."

Hogan didn't answer him. It seemed to make small difference now. The minute-hand sprang forward on the clock. Two minutes left. The agony rose like yeast. Hyman Ranse, his purpose clear, his resolve unshaken, moved a pace or two at the bar. Dan Hogan, rather strangely, moved along with him, leaving George's .44 beyond his reach.

Ranse spoke. "I'll say one thing, and it's the last thing I'll say—if you run, you can catch that stage!"

Hogan laughed at him now and Ranse's mouth came open. He licked his dry lips nervously. His eyes were quick, suspicious.

He then stepped back another pace. Hogan again followed him.

"Give me room!" Ranse screamed. "Give me room!"

The hand of the clock sprang forward for the next-to-last time. The seconds tolled in each man's mind. The sweat poured down like rain on Ranse's face. Dan took the next long, anxious step.

"I'm with you, Ranse," he calmly announced, "and at four o'clock, if you don't draw your gun, I'm going to spit in your face."

Now it was clear. It was so deadly clear. A fighter's hands against a gunman's hand.

There was not a yard of space between them. The equation wasn't hard to understand: this far to reach for a gun at your side —that far to punch at another man's jaw. Yet when the action came, it was hard to see. The .44 exploded and the cordite smell was in the air. It clung like the breath of lilies, but the scene lacked a corpse. Hyman Ranse was only unconscious, his jaw lop-sided where he lay. Most people said they hadn't seen the punch at all—maybe folks did things a little differently back east. The gun-smoke continued to rise like incense. There was a hole in the bar-room floor.

Hogan sighed. He let his breath run free. He stooped and picked up Ranse's very handsome .44. The gunman's friends were watching him, but they stood mutely by. Dan Hogan, who, as he had several times confessed in private, could not hit a cow at twenty yards, spoke quietly.

"Who wants to try me, gentlemen? Who wants to—"

Hogan got no further. George had come now from behind the bar and wrapped his arms around him, not in a gesture of protection, but in a kind of exultation.

"I, never," George began to bellow, "no, I never, as heaven's my witness, ever seen—" and he began to laugh.

Others joined him in wild merriment, though Hogan could not quite see the joke in a situation that had almost been his last. One of Ranse's men bent down and hooked a rough hand under the boss's armpit. Another fellow assisted. They dragged their fallen champion out through the door. Hogan dropped the shining Colt. He walked out through the vast crowd to the sunlight. He could see his wife in her bright dress running to him. The smell of the sweet grass rode the gentle wind.

He had a feeling that he would live a long time in the west.

★ ★ ★

NATURAL FAILING

Perhaps it is natural and human for people to fall in love and get married.

The Prime Minister of Siam

★ *With his first short story, "The Cripple of the Valley of Gold," John McGhee won the Argosy competition in April, 1944. Our congratulations to him now for winning first prize—£A2,000—in the Sydney Morning Herald's literary competition, with a novel, "The Middle Way." It deals with rivalries among big-business executives. Mr. McGhee, author of this Argosy reprint, lives in Sydney.*

LITTLE KIND OF FELLOW

BY JOHN McGHEE

THIS was a little kind of fellow. He had a scared-looking face and eyes that did a lot of blinking and a way of walking past you that made you think he was getting ready to duck if you looked sideways at him. He came to us early on this coal job. The Exchange sent him up; said we could maybe use him as a labourer. He stood there looking at me, holding his card, shuffling his feet, blinking his eyes. Thirty, he said he was. Just a little fellow, kind of weedy, kind of scared. Still, you've got to take what you can get.

Opencast coal mining, they call this job. We've dug ourselves a big hole in Yorkshire here, about forty feet deep and God knows how long, and we're busy lifting out half a million tons of coal before we put the dirt back, so we're not shy of labourers. If he can hold a shovel in his hands and push a barrow and keep himself more or less perpendicular for ten hours a day, then all right, he'll do. This little fellow didn't look much like a labourer when I started him. For one thing, he wasn't an Irishman, and then when he lifted the shovel it looked about the biggest shovel a man ever got round to handling.

Yes, kind of scared he looked. You would never have thought a little squirt like that would have had it in him to do what I'm going to tell you about.

Me—I'm the foreman on this job. I'm the guy that does most of the work round here and gets none of the thanks. The white-collar boys up in the office, they come in for all the credit; the workers, they rake in the overtime money; but me—well, I just

sweat my soul out fixing all the trouble and keeping the job moving.

Still, about this little fellow. He turned out pretty soon to be about the best thing in labourers we had. Nippy, willing, eager, he chased around with that barrow and his shovel like a kid at the seaside. There was no holding him. One thing I noticed right away: he was kind of fascinated by the big excavators. At first, he seemed to be nervous of them. We had him clearing up after one that was loading coal into lorries and he kept backing away whenever the bucket swung round over his head. Then he got more confident.

Sometimes I caught him leaning on his shovel and watching the big boy biting into the coal face and coming up high with the black dust spilling out of the bucket and dumping the coal, bang! into the lorries. He liked that and, sure, it's a sight you don't get used to easily, watching an excavator working.

At the tea breaks he didn't go over with the other men, but hung around the machines, looking at the levers, putting his foot up on the caterpillar tracks, watching the phut-phut of the exhaust smoke puffing out at the top of the cab. He got to talking to the drivers, and pretty soon he was helping them do the greasing. They let him get up in the seat sometimes and have a go at operating.

Then he started getting at me to put him on a machine. He was kind of desperate about it—asking every day. "Gimme a chance," he said. "I know I can work it." But he was such a little fellow.

In the end he got his way. At the holiday time, we put him on a little three-quarter-yard shovel loading muck into small dumpers. Hell, how he worked! He squared up that corner of the job as clean as your old mother's front parlour, and come every tea break he was climbing all over his machine with a bit of rag rubbing the dust off it. There was no denying it, he had the makings in him of a damn fine driver.

And, sure enough, in six months' time, this little fellow was the best operator on the job. We had him on the biggest face shovel on the site, working in rock, and he handled that machine like a toy.

These big excavators are a star attraction for all the visitors that come. God knows where they all arrive from, but there they are every day standing up there on the top looking down at the job—looking at the excavators. And you never saw anything that could be half so vain as an excavator driver when he's playing to the gallery.

The big bucket of the machine rips and bites into the rock

face with the engine all screaming and the cab bucking and shuddering on its tracks. Up the shovel comes, up, up, straining and tearing, spilling dust and rock, then round she goes, slowly, reaching out over the dumper wagon that's waiting underneath. The trap under the bucket opens and down it all comes into the belly of the dumper with a rumble like all the bunkers of hell were being filled. And all this time the driver is playing round with his levers, pushing and pulling, cocking an eye up now and then at the audience, making quite sure that they're getting the idea of what a clever guy he is to be moving the world about like this.

But this little fellow, he was something new in showing off. When there were visitors within half a mile of him, he used to go berserk in that cab of his, leaping about, slamming the levers, jumping up and down on his seat—about as busy as a one-armed paperhanger with the itch. He was so little and so puny, too, that when the shovel was pushing into the rock he had to perch on the edge of his seat and hold the lever forward with his foot—and he almost had to jump to pull the rope that opened the bucket over the dumper. But how he could drive! There were times when we ourselves stood with our mouths open watching the antics of him.

Now this is where the girl comes into it. She worked up in the office—one of the village girls. When she came past in the morning, she used to stand up there on the edge looking down at the excavator. Rain or fine, she used to stand there. And the same at night when she was going home.

A plump wee tart, she was, with red lips and goo-goo eyes and her skirts up round her backside. Not my class at all—no—but she was something like the promised land for this little fellow. There was just no holding him when she was around. He almost tore the guts out of his machine, driving it into the rock face for her, and out of the dust and the big boulders the size of a piano that came trundling and slithering down, you could see his skinny face smirking up at her and his eyes shining all bright like he'd been on the booze. And she stood there with the wind mussing up her hair, waving a little bit of handkerchief back at him.

That's the way it was—him down there, her up on the top—every morning and every night.

Soon they took to walking out together in the evenings. He lived in a hostel in the village and some of the boys used to tell me how he scrambled to get changed and dressed to go out with this little tart. He had it real bad.

You didn't have to look hard to see the change that was coming over him. At first, he was happy as hell. Came on the job every morning whistling, singing to himself—looked as if he was ready

to push a bus over. Then, with the days going by, he got calmer, steadier—happy in a kind of quiet way that gave him—well, hell, I suppose you could call it sort of—dignity. He didn't seem so little any more, this little fellow. He was growing to be man-size.

Now about this time we put a big Irishman by the name of Callaghan on to driving one of the Euclid dumpers that were working with the little fellow's excavator. Have you ever seen a Euclid? If you have, you'll not need me to remind you, but if ever you're standing by the side of the road minding your own business and you see something like a sawn-off bus lugging a young house after it—then there's your Euclid. They load around twenty tons of muck, and they're bigger than it's decent to be.

Well, this Callaghan drove one. Fine-looking lad. A lot of black hair, white teeth, arms on him like a giant, and when he laughed you could hear it clear across the site. Yes, fine-looking big fellow—but, God, he was a devil for the women. Every contract I knew him on, he was chasing some wee lassie; and from all accounts he didn't have to chase them for long. No—the kind of guy you wouldn't trust your grandmother with.

These Euclids come one at a time to the excavator and he fills them up with rock and away they go to the tip. All day they do that till pretty soon the landscape doesn't look just the way you remembered it. Callaghan was no amateur at the driving. He handled that big dumper like it was a small car—broad and brown and laughing he was, up there behind the big wheel.

The little tart saw him that way when she came to watch in the mornings—and, sure enough, Callaghan saw her. He bawled up to her and waved his big hand and capered about till she couldn't keep the laughter in her. The little fellow in the excavator took all this in—every morning he took it in—watching all the time. He didn't say anything to the Irishman. You could see he was scared stiff of him.

Next thing was that the girl stopped waving her little bit of handkerchief at him. She spent all her time there laughing at the Irishman, and when he took his Euclid off to the tip she went away too. The little fellow went on being cowed for a bit and then—kind of desperate—he made that big excavator of his do everything but stand on its head to try and get her interest back. Nobody ever worked a face shovel like that, and God knows how it stood up to it. He went at it morning after morning, driving like a madman—but she never looked at him.

He got quiet again, this little fellow, scared again—looked all kind of crumpled up.

Then at nights big Callaghan started walking out the little tart. Everybody knew about that. He used to shout the odds about it all over the job. Next thing we hear, sure enough, is that he's got her in trouble.

We heard about it one dinner-time. Somebody had got the news from the office. I remember it was a hot, heavy day. There was no air down in the cut. Nothing but grit and coal dust. Then, when the boys were all walking back to their machines, kicking bits of stone, stirring up the dust with their boots, one of them shouted over to Callaghan something about the girl. The big fellow threw back his head and laughed and laughed.

" God," he roared, " her—she was easy as hell."

At this, I watched the little fellow. He was up near his machine. He was kind of stumbling along, looking at the ground. It seemed to take all the guts he had left in him to get up on to the caterpillar track and into his cab. Then he looked round. I saw his face. It was all white and sick-looking and his eyes were sunk in with black rings round them like coal dust.

He lifted the arm and the shovel began to bite into the rock. All the machines on the job got started, and the air was shaking with the noise. The dust came up and the heat got worse. It was Callaghan's turn to fill up under the excavator. He took the Euclid up close and began to back it in. He was still laughing. I could see he was still laughing, and every now and then he'd jerk his thumb towards the little fellow and roar louder than ever.

The big bucket of the excavator was shuddering up through the rock. Big jagged boulders were sliding and bumping down the face. The engine was screaming. Then the bucket came up high, carrying two tons of rock, and swung out towards the Euclid. The cab came round.

I saw the little fellow's face again, all white through the dust that was swirling up. I heard Callaghan laugh. I saw the bucket come round—and then, God, the arm dropped and the shovel and the rock and every damned thing came down on him and smashed the life out of him.

The little fellow stopped his engines and sat there looking at the mess. Then he began to cry like a bloody kid . . .

All for a wee tart, mind you; a plump wee tart with red lips and goo-goo eyes and skirts up round her backside—that I wouldn't have given you tuppence for. Hell!

★ ★ ★

SOAP OPERA

Give me a laundry list and I'll set it to music.

ROSSINI

REMEMBER, REMEMBER

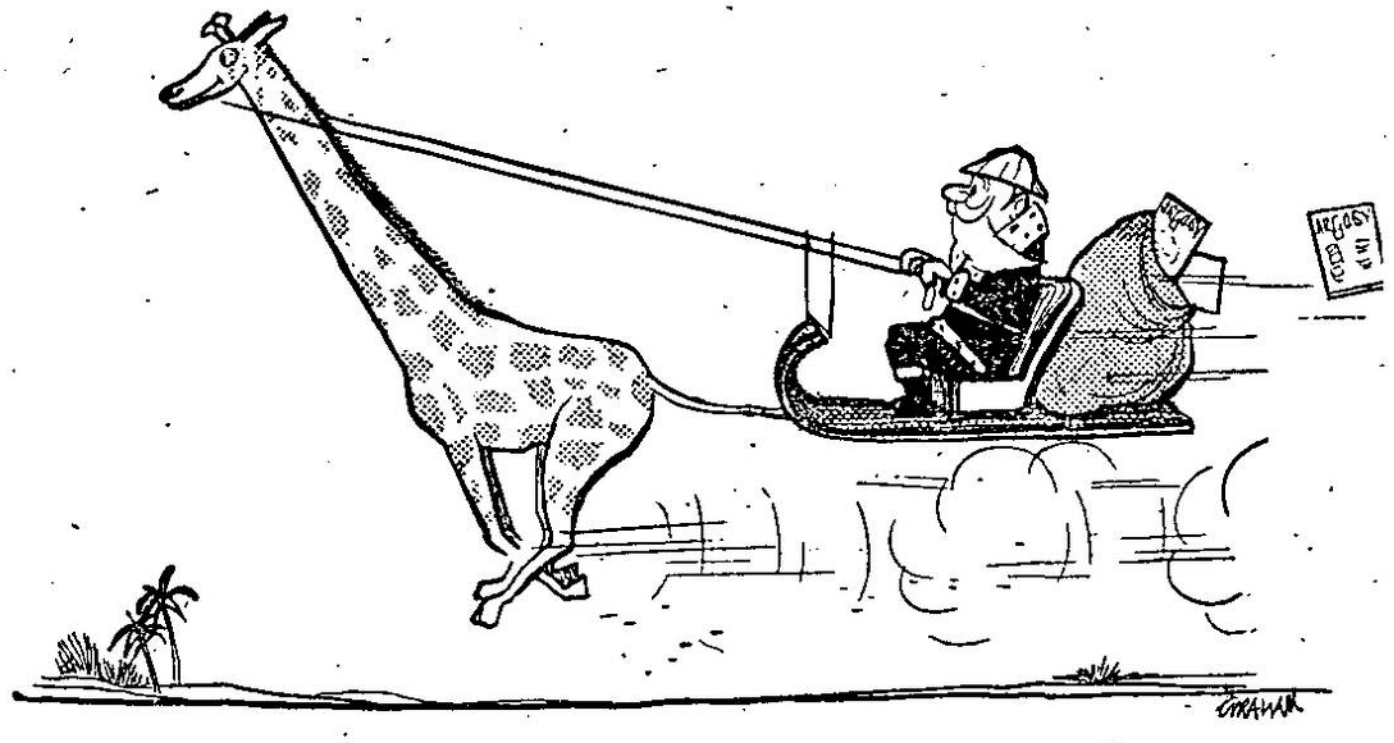
The fifth of November—how many shopping days to Christmas (see below)—and so on. Or, if you're wise, leave it to the wife and kids, and settle down to the fine display of sparklers in store for you in next month's ARGOSY on sale November 8

H. A. MANHOOD A gay new story about a feckless artist and his beautiful wife who leave a colourful trail of pictures and broken hearts through the length and breadth of Erin

IRWIN SHAW Paris of the boulevards, the bistros, the big races . . . against this lively background the best-selling author of " Lucy Crown " tells an engrossing story of a pair of American ex-pilots caught in a mesh of international intrigue

KEM BENNETT A young man on parole, a runaway girl, a police commissioner, and a chara of touring theatricals —a load like that on board a ferry makes for anything but plain sailing

MIGNON G. EBERHART Forgery's one thing, murder's another, but Miss Eberhart's celebrated banker sleuth is ready to take on all comers—even a giant hound of the Baskerville breed!



Keep one jump ahead! Now is the time to think of friends overseas—turn to inside cover and take Christmas in your stride.

MEN WITH BOWLER HATS

" Don't they look kind of cute? "
said Auntie Rosemary

BY ANGUS WILSON

JULIA'S Daddy wasn't like other little girls' fathers. He didn't go to an office or a factory or work on a farm; neither was he a doctor nor a soldier. On some days he didn't get up until very late in the afternoon. Then he used to go out to play cards until such a late hour that when Julia woke up to hear him going to bed in the room next to her own she used often to think it was time to get up because the sun was shining.

Sometimes a lot of gentlemen used to come to their room or flat—for Julia and her Daddy were always moving—to play cards there. Then Daddy used to put her on a chair beside him while he played. He would give her chocolates, and green and red tiddly-winks called chips to play with. " My little mascot," he called her.

Julia used to get very sleepy on those evenings and fall asleep in her chair. In the end Daddy would carry her to her bed.

There were other days when Daddy got up very early—mostly in the summer, which he called " the flat season "—and went off to the races. This was a lonely time for Julia. She would play with her toys or read her story books and see no one all day, except perhaps old Mrs. Scrumper who cleaned for them. Mrs. Scrumper was always talking about it being a " shame " and a " scandal."

Once she and Julia's Daddy had a row and after that she hardly ever said anything to Julia, and even answered questions by saying, " it was none of her business."

Of course Julia had been to school—lots of schools, in fact. But she never seemed to stay at them long. If she didn't like the first few days her Daddy always told her she needn't go again. " They can't teach my little imp anything she doesn't know, can they? " he would say.

But even when Julia liked the school very much, as she did the kindergarten near Hampstead Heath, she was seldom there

for long. Daddy would have one of his grumbling moods and talk about cutting losses and that would be the end of that.

Once when they were living in very dingy rooms in a street near the Oval a lady came from the Ministry to ask why Julia was not at school. Daddy seemed very pleased to see her and laughed and talked a lot. When the lady went away she said she was so glad she had been able to help. But after she had gone Daddy was very angry and they had moved the next day.

They were always moving. Although Julia was only eight she could remember living in more than twenty different houses. She had been only three when her mother died, but after that she and her Daddy were always on the move.

Sometimes they lived in quite grand hotels with porters and waiters, and then Mr. Chalpers, her Daddy, was always very jolly and bought her lots of presents. At first the waiters and porters used to be very jolly, too, they would play snap with her and bring her glasses of lemonade without her asking for them. But in the end, they always stopped taking any notice of her; and to Mr. Chalpers they were often quite rude.

Julia had learnt that this strange change in behaviour usually meant that she and her Daddy were soon going to leave the hotel. Sometimes they left all her clothes and toys behind, and then for weeks Julia would have only one dress to wear. Although this worried her she had learnt not to complain to Mr. Chalpers because at such times he was always very cross anyway.

Grand hotels were usually followed in Julia's life by poky little bedrooms, all iron bedsteads and cracked jugs and basins. There were always a lot of stairs to climb up to these bedrooms and when Daddy came home very late after playing cards, Julia would wake up to hear him stumbling on the stairs, and doors would open and shut and angry voices would shout into the darkness.

Some of the ladies who looked after these houses were fat and wore curl-papers, and some were thin with bright golden hair and dressing-gowns covered with flowers; but, fat and thin alike, they had voices like the peacock Julia had heard screaming when she went once with Daddy to the Zoo.

These ladies only cooked one dish for their dinners and that was cabbage: they used to boil it all day and night so that the house was full of the smell of cabbage.

In the streets outside these houses there were usually a lot of children playing hopscotch. Julia would much have liked to join them, but Mr. Chalpers would never allow it. " I'm not having my little girl picking up an accent," he used to say.

Twice in her life Julia had lived with her Daddy in a large

flat with furniture all their own. Once there had even been a nursery with a doll's house and a rocking-horse. At that time Mr. Chalpers was always laughing. It was then that he had talked about getting a governess for his "undisciplined little imp." But very shortly after that some men with bowler hats and big moustaches had come to live in the flat. They sat about for many days, making themselves tea and giving Julia pieces of chocolate.

Mrs. Clarke, who was very superior and a dentist's widow and did Mr. Chalpers's housekeeping for him at the flat, said she wouldn't stay anywhere where there were bailiffs, just as though the men in bowler hats had been black-beetles. So Mrs. Clarke gave notice and left.

A few days later the men in bowler hats packed the doll's house and the rocking-horse into crates and took all the furniture away in a van.

That summer Mr. Chalpers took Julia to the seaside. They lived in some very dark rooms in a side street near the station. Mr. Chalpers was very gloomy but as it was "the flat season" he was away most of the day.

Although Julia wasn't supposed to go out on her own she used to wait until he had gone and then run down to the beach. It was an enchanting time for her. She made sand castles with other children and sometimes they shared their lunch with her. Once she caused quite a sensation by doing an improvised fairy dance outside the pierrot show on the pier.

Then suddenly Mr. Chalpers became very jolly again; and they moved to the Grand Hotel on the front, where Julia could sit among the potted palm trees and listen to a gentleman playing on the violin.

It was at the Grand Hotel that they met Auntie Rosemary. Auntie Rosemary was really called Mrs. Gregoby and she was an American lady. After they had known her for about a week, however, Daddy said Julia was to call her Auntie Rosemary. When Auntie Rosemary wasn't at the hairdresser's having her hair made blue, they all used to go out in hired cars into the country. Whatever Auntie Rosemary saw in the English countryside—whether it was a church, or a haystack, or a garage—she liked. "Isn't that the cutest thing?" she would say.

Julia did not find it very cute, because Daddy and Auntie Rosemary talked all the time about their mines and their investments and their capital. In the end, Daddy nearly always took Auntie Rosemary's hand and would laugh and say she needed a man to look after her affairs.

Sometimes Auntie Rosemary used to give Julia little presents and call her a " funny little old philosopher " and " a wise little head on tiny shoulders," but, when Daddy wasn't looking, Julia thought Auntie Rosemary gave her some very sharp looks.

At last one day Daddy told Julia that he and Auntie Rosemary were going to be married. He said that she must be very kind to her new Mummy because she had had a very sad life and her nerves weren't very good. He added that maybe it would be best for Julia to go to a boarding-school, but that it would certainly be a very nice school because from now on they were going to be very rich.

Then he told Julia that Auntie Rosemary had a little boy of nine years old called Timmie who was away at school. Julia would soon meet Timmie, he said, for they were going the next week to an hotel in London and from there they would visit Auntie Rosemary in her lovely flat near Hyde Park. Mr. Chalpers kissed Julia and stroked her hair. " I know my little girl will be very good friends with Timmie for her Daddy's sake," he said.

When Julia *did* meet Timmie she thought him a very strange boy with his long knickerbockers and his cowboy shirt. However, she was very polite. Auntie Rosemary gave them a very large tea with lemon meringue pie and crumpets, " Just to show," she said, " that there was a little bit of her on each side of the Atlantic." But Daddy said that all it showed him was that if she went on spoiling him like this he'd soon get disgustingly fat.

After tea Julia and Timmie went to play in another large room at the end of the hall. At first it was all rather sticky. Timmie showed her his books, which had no covers and were all stained with ink spots, and some old bits of building-toys.

Julia could think of nothing to say about these, so she asked him about his school. Oh, it was all right, he said, but he wouldn't be back next term because of the bill not being paid again. Anyway, it didn't matter, he added, he would go to a much better school next term, for now that Mom was being married they would be very rich. Julia did not quite understand this, but she supposed it was to do with Auntie Rosemary having a man to look after her affairs.

In the end they fell to playing dressing-up games. Julia found that Timmie knew all the same people to dress up as that she did—the waiters and porters, and the ladies in curl-papers—though of course all Timmie's people spoke American and his children played baseball instead of hopscotch.

When at last Daddy and Auntie Rosemary came to say it was time to go they found Julia and Timmie sitting on an old playbox

wearing black paper hats on their heads, and pretending to drink tea out of mugs. Timmie had painted a large moustache on his upper lip.

"Don't they look kind of cute?" asked Auntie Rosemary.

And Daddy pinched Timmie playfully and said, "He's as big a ragamuffin as my little imp."

On the way home Julia told her Daddy all about the afternoon's games. At first Mr. Chalpers roared with laughter, but when she came to the ladies in curl-papers he looked rather glum. Then she asked him if he knew who they were pretending to be on the playbox, and when he didn't answer she said, "They were the men in bowler hats that come to people's houses." Timmie remembered them coming four times to Auntie Rosemary's, she added.

When they got back to the hotel Mr. Chalpers seemed quite angry. He told the porter that he was never in to Auntie Rosemary if she rang up. But she never did, so perhaps Timmie told *her* all about the men in bowler hats, too.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to IN A NUTSHELL on page 17

1. *The East Kent Regiment, the old 3rd Foot*
2. *Connecticut (pronounced Connetticut)*
3. *Walnut. The tree originally came from Persia.*
4. *Hazel*
5. *In a melodrama, The Broken Sword, by William Dimond, produced at Covent Garden in 1816*
6. *i. the Chilean pine, Araucaria imbricata; ii. more kicks than halfpence*
7. *An almond with a double kernel. The finder must share with another person, to whom a present must be given at the next meeting.*
8. *August 22nd*
9. *Almonds; apricot and peach kernels; hazelnuts*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Depute.* 4, *Stimulus.* 9, *Winkle.* 10, *Croupier.* 12, *Cent.* 13, *Wives.* 14, *Deal.* 17, *Suffolk punch.* 18, *Master of Arts.* 23, *Alas.* 24, *Leven.* 25, *Adze.* 28, *Contempt.* 29, *Corrib.* 30, *Sombrero.* 31, *Cranky.*

Down. 1, *Downcast.* 2, *Penknife.* 3, *Till.* 5, *Three-quarter.* 6, *Maul.* 7, *Loiter.* 8, *Surely.* 11, *Wicket-keeper.* 15, *Moral.* 16, *Scoff.* 18, *Gridiron.* 19, *Assembly.* 21, *Caucus.* 22, *Magnum.* 26, *Hear.* 27, *Hour.*

A SOCIABLE PLOVER

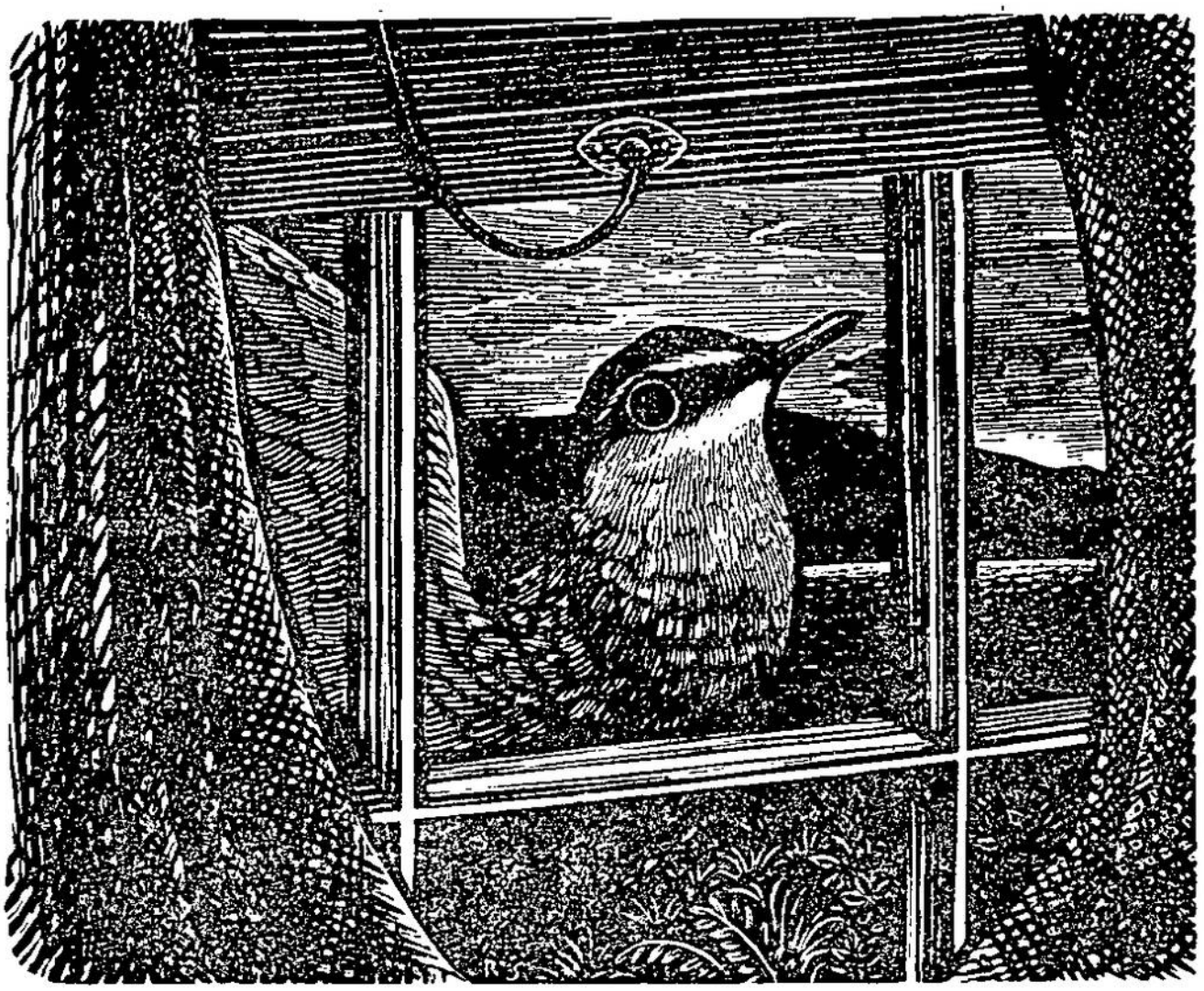
Gripping Short Novel by

ERIC LINKLATER

WITH the howl and bellow of the storm in my ears, I went downstairs to my work-room. The house stood quite exposed to the north-west, and since midnight we had felt the walls shaking under the impact of a gale that drove from Labrador across the wild, white-tipped Atlantic—a graveyard torn up to show dead bones—and menaced with its fury the shelter of our thick-slated roof.

As always, I opened the door of my work-room with caution, quietly, with a little surge of expectancy. The big window looked out at a well-grown lawn I had levelled and sown seven years before: a lawn that was guarded on its western side by a thick, untidy hedge of blackthorn and beech, and to the north ran into some forty acres of thin heather grazed by a score of black-faced sheep. Below the lawn was a small meadow, and beyond it the ever-changing, bright-waved loch on which, for the last two or three years, I had taken my chiefest pleasure.

The new-made lawn had attracted an uncommon variety of birds to its bright sward. Snow-buntings came in winter, a chorus of small, clear voices rippling in the white drift of their wings; and black-headed gulls from the colony that nested by the marshy pool in the moor. Twice I have seen a greenshank parading on long pale legs, and once a dotterel looked at me with infinite surprise—or so it seemed—under his white eyebrow. Last year I was enchanted by a pair of snipe that, every morning for a fortnight, brought their young onto the lawn. They were, to begin



with, intensely shy and cautious. One of the old birds, treading high-toed and hesitant, would first make a reconnaissance; and then, as if to signal that all was well, would begin to prod the green turf with its long beak. The two nestlings would follow, and they, unlike their parents, were utterly confident, wholly without fear, and ran about on tottering feet—two tufts of brown feather with bright eyes—while the old birds kept their nervous watch.

I had, then, fallen into the habit of approaching my window almost as carefully as a scout crawling to a skyline—but this morning I had no need to go as far. The window was a transparent drum-skin, reverberating the noise of the gale, and on the ledge was a bird like a lapwing in shape and size; one wing, aloft, as if dislocated—its feathers fluttering—was pressed hard against the glass. Its black cap was ruffled, and a round black eye stared into the room, and straight at me, with the intensity (as I first thought) of desperate fear.

I felt an absurd anxiety. I wanted, immediately, to free it from its obvious distress; and that I could not see how to do. Should I open the middle panel of the window, and coax it into the shelter of the room?

I went nearer the window, now puzzling to identify the bird. I had never seen one of its sort before: of that I was sure. Its colouring was elegant: a pale fawn with a golden throat, black primaries with a black-and-white tail, a neat black cap with a blue

burnish and a white eyebrow, and a curved black line running back from the eye. It was slimmer than a lapwing, perhaps a little larger, and its legs were dark.

I went closer still, and the shining circle of its eye held me in a fixed regard. Its expression had changed; or so I thought. It seemed now to be staring at me with a cold and dark appraisal. But that, I told myself, was ridiculous, and slowly I approached till I was only a foot or so from the window. Then the bird resettled its fluttered wing, turned inwards—the wind under its tail lifted it like a fan—and looked straight at me with gleaming, slightly converging eyes. I felt a prickle of cold on my forehead, a little draught of cold under the arms, and foolishly—I heard the folly of it—I laughed. A nervous laugh that, by making me aware of myself, brought me to my senses.

From a shelf I took down a volume of Witherby's *Handbook of British Birds*, and soon found what I wanted. I wasn't to be blamed for not recognizing my visitor, which was described as a "very rare vagrant." Only once before had it been seen, or recognized in Scotland, and then as far from here as Orkney. I returned to the window, to compare it with the picture in Witherby, and now, with no apparent difficulty, the bird took off against the gale and flew to the far end of the lawn. It flew like a lapwing, and in the partial shelter of the hedge it settled, ran a yard or two, paused, and ran on: just like a lapwing. I went out to look at it again.

The wind met me with a buffet, and I leaned against it. The sky was a tumbled mass of fast-moving cloud, with here and there a pale blue gulf of vacancy, and the loch was a white-haired fury of grey water. A pillow of clotted foam had been blown against the boat-house door, and the jetty below it was smothered in white. I said to the bird, "You've chosen a poor sort of day to come visiting." As if unaware that I was only a few yards away, it poked suddenly at the grass—tilting its body on stiff legs, like a lapwing—to pull out a grub. I watched it for a few minutes, and went in again.

On Plate 122 in Witherby there was a very pretty picture of it: a Sociable Plover, beyond question, though according to the book it was smaller than a lapwing, and my visitor was certainly a little bigger. I felt extremely pleased to have so notable an addition to the guests of my lawn, and I thought of writing a short letter to *The Times* to boast a little of my Plover. But that might bring a dozen fervid ornithologists to the island, to pester me with their enthusiasm; which I did not want. So I put off letter-writing, as, for the last six or seven months, I have again and again put off writing of any sort; often with less excuse, or no excuse at all. No excuse but an overpowering sense of loss and hopelessness, of the unbearable tedium of writing when I know that none will read. Or only a beggarly few hundred now.

It was different when I wrote *John Gaffikin*, and sold 50,000 in Britain, almost as many in America. The second one did nearly as well, and the third was better than the first. Much better. And

I deserved success, for I had found, with brilliant discovery, an idea of durable value and I knew how to realize it. I wrote well—they all admitted that—and I sold well.

But why can't I now? I have written three others, of the same pattern, of the same family, and written better than I did before. With what result? A dribbling diminuendo of critical appreciation—but I don't give twopence for the critics—and a cascade of falling sales. Well, what in hell am I to do?

How can I write—how, how?—when no one reads? My last novel was my very best—and sold 2,300 copies. Now I'm in the seventh volume of the saga, and caught by the heels in apathy. The Romantic Revival is my background now, or should be; and how can I write of a flare of hope—even such foolish hope—in a gloom of accidie and no hope at all? Six other volumes I have planned, and I know that I shall never complete them. But what else can I do?

Drink a little, and delude myself . . . I drank a little—not much: less than half a bottle of gin—and wrote two pages that I tore up before lunch came in. That day it was cold roast beef, beetroot and boiled potatoes, a slice of apple tart. With a pint of beer. I slept for an hour in my big chair, before the fire, and woke to a sound of scratching on a window pane. The wind had gone down, there was no more than a light breeze blowing, and in the quiet of a late-spring afternoon the plick-plack and urgent scraping of its beak on the glass had almost the compulsion of troopers at the door in the quiet before dawn. I woke and saw the bird against a background of glinting water, tall blue hill, and shining sky. The Sociable Plover on the window ledge.

Its eye caught mine as mine turned towards it. Caught and held them. I was not properly awake, and perhaps that made me submissible to hypnosis. For I was, I think, hypnotized. The bird itself seemed to grow bigger against the lighted frame of water and bright sky, and the black circle (with a glint of red in it) of its unwinking, gleaming eye expanded till it was like one of those old, convex, sombre mirrors, in which I saw myself, infinitely diminished, and stretched upon a rack for inquisition.

I shall not say what the inquisition revealed. Some of it, I suppose, was true—if truth can keep its complexion ten years after the event?—but more, I think, was the hysteria that confession under torment must also elicit. I resurrected and exposed a dead, forgotten past. I lay in a quivering fear—for how long I do not know—and returned to normal consciousness in a cold sweat of exhaustion. The bird was still there, on the window ledge, but now of natural size again; and its round and glittering eye seemed mildly inquisitive, innocently perplexed.

I went to the cupboard, and got a drink; and my teeth chattered against the glass. I sat on a hard chair and fought my defeated nerves for self-control. Suave and elegant, the Sociable Plover watched me, but now with no animosity in its gaze.

I took a little more whisky, and the shining peace of the late

afternoon began to assuage and mollify my remembered fear . . .

The Plover, as though contented and at home, walked mincingly up and down the ledge. I could see more of his delicate and gaily brilliant colouring. His throat caught a golden light, and the white eyebrow under his luminous blue-black cap was a streak of bland irony. His back and wing-covers were dove-hued, and the dark of his belly shaded into russet. He was very beautiful.

I got up and went to the window, pretending now that my fright had been nothing but a nightmare; and hoping, with a shiver, to make a friend of my Plover. But he flew away, with a slow wing-beat and a creak in his wings, like a lapwing when it turns in the air to display its skill.

The next morning was fine, and the wind, which had died away at dark, now blew gently from the south, or south-south-west. Isobel made me some sandwiches, I put up my rod, and pulled out my boat. It was a perfect fishing-day—the temperature of the air about four degrees warmer than the water, with a good new hatch of fly, the terns hawking and showing where they were—and by one o'clock I had caught seven fine trout, the best of the basket just under two pounds.

I went ashore on Rowan Island—three rowans, growing under a big rock, give it its name—to eat my sandwiches and drink my beer; and for a little while I was content. What were books, critics, and a besotted populace compared with this?

The loch was a dimpled blue—light-dimpled, pale cornflower-blue—and the sharp hills of the outer islands rose beyond the contours of our own land like the ruined battlements of gigantic Gothic castles. Cirrus clouds drifted on the idle sky, and somewhere a rain-goose was hooting with sweet melancholy. A red-shank on a half-green pebble nodded and said, " Chip-chip," a swan lifted vainglorious wings, bent its proud head, and swam past me with an elegant assumption of indifference.

Why should I care for popular esteem, I thought? What's the worm in my soul that torments my soul to look for fame? Why can't I stand up straight—straight in arrogant assurance of myself—and put my heel upon it? And having crushed it, enjoy all this with the full-throated appetite of innocence? But innocence died long ago, I can't remember when. And that's part of the answer.

Then I saw the Sociable Plover. It stood in the water's edge—water, half an inch deep, just covering its feet—and delicately picked its way. It paid no attention to me, but I grew most uncomfortably aware of it. I watched it for a few minutes and then, stuffing a remnant sandwich and an empty bottle into my fishing-bag, returned to my boat. I pushed off, and presently, with the island between us, began to fish again. I saw a rising fish, some twenty yards away, and with a thrust of the oars moved towards it. I cast within a foot of the rippling circle it had made, threw again—and there, hovering above my tail fly, was the Plover.

Savagely I cast at the bird—and missed by a rod's length, so

quick was its movement. It began to circle me, with slow deliberate wing-beats, but sideslipping sometimes with sudden speed. I tried to ignore it, and with all the will-power I could summon, concentrated on fishing.

I saw a black gnat on the water, and changed my top fly for a Pennell; but my fingers trembled and I had difficulty in tying the knot. It occurred to me—with a shock of occurrence: the shock of an idea flung like a pebble into my mind—that there was only one way to escape the bird's malignant eye and the persecution of its scrutiny; and without realizing what I was doing I put down my rod and leaning over the side looked through a green transparency to the moss-carpet six or seven feet below. There, on the bottom, in the shadow of the boat . . .

But then the shadow of the bird fell on the water, and I knew, with a sickened release from it, that the thought, the nascent intention, wasn't mine, but came from without. A pebble flung into my mind to unnerve and kill. As quickly as I could I started the outboard motor, and at full throttle—the noise was comforting—headed for home.

Next morning, when I went down to work, the bird was on the window ledge. I drew the curtains against it, and turned on the light. I had written a page or two the night before, and I settled to revision. But it was no good. Plick-plack, plick-plack on the glass, and then a scraping noise as if it were stropping its beak. I had to face it, and pulling back the curtains I looked it full in the eye from a distance of two or three feet.

Bold at first—pleased with myself for being bold—I drove my thought and enmity against it like a phalanx, like a pointed horde of imperatives to go and never trouble me again. But the phalanx split and dissolved, and the obsidian eye, with a glow of fire or garnet in it, came shining through, shining into my mind where gradually it lighted a growing belief that by yielding to its invitation, its command, I would find the happiness that had long eluded me.

Down to the shore, it said, and out to the clear green water where the floor is carpeted with moss, and there's peace for ever in that quietness far below the air of a world that's poisoned by hatred, frustration, and fear. Down to the deep green peace . . .

I felt conviction spreading through my thinking parts, faith welling from an unknown spring, and I turned to the door with the slow obedience of a sleep-walker, and in the long hall of our reconstructed farmhouse—the hall that once had been a cow-byre or pen for calves—I met Isobel. She, in a little cloud of literary confusion—but sunlit, as in all her clouds—exclaimed, "Oh darling, you must help me. I was coming to ask you, is *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Eyre or Charlotte Brontë, and do you think it's a good book to recommend to the Women's Institute for next winter's reading? I've got to go to a meeting tonight, and several of us have promised to suggest twelve really good books, that

everyone should know, and I can't think of anything but *Vanity Fair* and *Gone with the Wind* and the new one by that French girl which isn't suitable at all."

I sat down and began to laugh—or did I cry? Both, I think.

"Torquil, what is the matter? You haven't been drinking already, have you?"

"Not a drop. But you have saved my life."

I pulled her down beside me, and fondled her. To that she always responded, and as she was subject to me, so was I to her. Her mind was only half furnished, but her body—and indeed her spirit—gave me continual delight. There were days when I avoided talk with her, but few nights when I did not go thankfully to bed.

Now in the long dark hall—the roof was low and the windows narrow—we sat enfolded, my head to her shoulder, and from her warmth and comfort I slowly drew sanity again to fill the gulf of madness that the abominable bird had dug. I held her close, talked nonsense that gradually became deliberate nonsense to please and make her laugh—and then, suddenly confident that with Isobel beside me the bird would have no power, I said, "Come to my room and I'll tell you the books to recommend, and who wrote them; it's important to remember that." But when we went in, the bird had gone.

It came again in the late afternoon, and next morning. I took to wandering, and from room to room carried a pen, a blotting-pad, and a sheaf of paper. In the drawing-room, spare bedrooms, a closet that I called my office and never used, I sat on unfamiliar chairs, the pad on my knee, and tried to think of Everard Gaffikin, an early camp-follower of the Romantic Revival, and his disillusionment in France by the September massacres. To write of disillusion should have been easy, but the will to write had died, and in truth all I was trying to do was to keep my mind off that infernal Plover, its eyes off me.

The days became a hideously tormented, endless, and ludicrous game of hide-and-seek. Rooms have windows, and from one to another the bird pursued me—sometimes anticipated me—scraped on the frosted panes of a water-closet if I sat too long. I dared not go out, though day after day brought good fishing-weather, and every morning I woke in fear of daylight. Twice I found the Plover at the window of my dressing-room when I went in to shave; twice again I tried to outstare him, and called for Isobel to come and help me when I felt my mind dissolving and his intention filling the void.

Isobel—God bless her kind and silly heart—thought I had been drinking too much, and as she believed an author must drink a great deal to be an author, was neither perplexed nor unduly disturbed. She probably felt proud to think that an author's wife must share his unhappiness.

My spirit broke before hers showed any bruise; and when, after ten or eleven days of persecution, the bird came yet again

to my work-room window, I took a half-empty bottle of whisky, and threw it with all my strength against the glass.

The Plover, unhurt, flew off; and then at last I overcame a curious, superstitious reluctance. I unstrapped my gun-case and took out one of the good pair I had bought with money that *John Gaffikin* made. I had not used them for three or four years, for I gave up shooting when I became more interested in watching birds than killing them; and they were smeared with grease. I cleaned one roughly with a handkerchief, put stock to barrel, and found a few cartridges . . .

Anne McQueen

My name is Anne McQueen. I am a doctor, of the ordinary, general sort—M.B., Ch.B., University of Inverdoon, 1947—and I live in Morissey because I am too sensible to be ambitious, because I have always loved the Western Isles, and in a rather unwomanly fashion I am very fond of fishing.

I took a good degree at Inverdoon, and the Gold Medal for Midwifery. My fellow students said I owed the award to inside knowledge, because I was pregnant at the time. I had got married, in my third year, to a young man in the Royal Air Force. He was killed while flying on the Air Lift to Berlin, after the Russians had closed the roads, and in consequence of that, and, I suppose, of an old-fashioned sense of duty, I volunteered, after graduation, for service under the Allied Military Government in Germany.

So my mother took charge of the baby, and I had two years in Germany—about six months in Berlin—and then came home and did a course at the Rotunda—for midwifery really interested me—and two hospital spells, of six months each, in Manchester and Birmingham. Nothing I saw of industrial England inclined me to spend my life there, so I went home and looked for a job in the Highlands or Islands. I jumped at the chance of Morissey, and perhaps because no one else thought it worth applying for, I got it. And for five years I've loved every moment of my life and work here. Well, not quite, but most of it.

I'm putting all this down to show that I'm a normal woman, because the value of my evidence, for what follows, depends on my normality. If I were writing an autobiography I could say a lot more to prove this, but for the present I'm only interested in the case of Torquil Malone. A bad man, but attractive.

He is a man of importance in the island, though he does nothing much, in a local way, to sustain his importance except spend a lot of money. But he is, or has been famous—relatively famous, by our standards at least—and that we respect. There is no one else here with a name that is known, or used to be, in London and New York and Los Angeles.

According to my day-book it was on May 23rd, just before lunch, that Isobel telephoned and asked me to come and see Torquil. He had been drinking more heavily than usual—than his usual habit during the last six months or so—and now he had become violent.

He had thrown a whisky bottle through a window, and gone out with his gun. It didn't promise to be an agreeable interview, so I went immediately, without giving myself time to think about it. He lived three miles from the village, beside the loch.

Isobel was waiting for me at the roadside, looking self-important rather than distressed. She is a stupid woman, but very pretty. A minimum of intelligence, no nerves, and a lovely face and figure: a lucky mixture, I suppose, and perhaps I'm jealous.

"He's all right now," she said. "I mean he hasn't shot himself, and that's what I thought he was going to do after I heard the crash and saw him coming out with a gun. But I kept my head and didn't say anything to annoy him."

"What did you say?"

"I just asked if there'd been an accident."

I left my car on the road, and we walked up together. Their house was a rebuilt farmhouse with the farm buildings added to it, making three sides of a square with a paved court and a sun-dial where the midden had been. An attractive house, and very expensively furnished.

I found Torquil in his work-room, with a broken window to show where the bottle had gone. He was quiet and melancholy, full of self-pity, and—as I thought at first—gently raving.

"It isn't drink," he said. "Drink's been the salve and lenitive. Drink's kept me sane: drink and Isobel. No, the plain, undeniable fact—and you won't believe it—is that I'm haunted. Haunted by a fetch."

"Is that what you were shooting at?"

"Yes."

"Did you hit it?"

"Do you know what a fetch is?"

"No," I said.

"I'll show you what this one is."

He went to a shelf—two of his walls were lined with books to the ceiling—and taking down one of a set, showed me the picture of a pretty, dove-coloured bird with a black head, called a Sociable Plover.

"That's it," he said.

"You've been drinking a lot, Torquil, haven't you?"

"Who wouldn't, who's persecuted as I have been?"

"But what is a fetch? Does it just mean a bird?"

He went into a long rigmarole of explanation, and I watched him a little anxiously, knowing that only an hour or so before he had suddenly become violent. His voice was low and monotonous, and his eyes were uneasy, turning to the window and back again.

He had deteriorated a lot in a few months—and I, perhaps, was a factor in that—but in a dissolute way, which was now a coarse dissolution, he was still extraordinarily handsome; and I thought of the uniformed photograph of him, in Isobel's room, that showed a head of brutal vigour and Roman formality: a severe and sculptured beauty. Now the lines were looser, the eyes duller, and the

skin unhealthy: there was a little reddish patch, inflamed and pustular, on one side of the neck.

But he was still a man to look at—as a man—with admiration, and his figure, though a belly pouted, showed the breadth and squareness of a soldier and an athlete. He was very sorry for himself, and his voice remained low and miserable.

" So you see what it is," he said. " Sometimes it's called a wraith, or apparition. It's the person himself, or herself, but not in his or her proper shape. No, never! It could be an animal, or something without apparent life. And it's sent—a ' sending ' is another name for it—by the person it is, or an agent who's taken control of him, for the single purpose of driving the intended victim to madness and death. It's the blackest magic that the adept knows."

" How do you know about it? "

" There's not much," he said, " with which I haven't a surface acquaintance—or better."

That was his natural, sometimes insufferable arrogance cropping out; and I was glad to hear it. If he retained something of his arrogance, he probably had the willingness to be cured, and could be persuaded to reassert his sanity.

" Do you know," I asked, " who's likely to have sent the fetch? Can you think of anyone who hates you enough to want to drive you mad? "

" Forty," he said. " Forty, at least. I haven't lived an easy life."

Arrogance again. But his eyes, alert and frightened, turning to the window. He told me how often, how persistently, the bird had pestered him, and something of the death-wish it implanted and fostered in him. We went out to look for it, but could not find it. He had not hit it when he shot at it: that he knew.

I told him the best thing he could do was to go away for a couple of months. Leave Morissey and the bird—in which I didn't believe. " And stop drinking so much," I said.

His lunch was brought in on a tray, and I went to eat with Isobel and the children. Two little girls, six and four, with pretty faces and futile minds. Their mother's children. If Torquil was suffering from melancholia, I thought, it was partly the fault of Isobel and her brood.

I had three or four patients to see in the afternoon, but I thought not so much of them as of Torquil. I knew too much of him for a detached, impartial, scientific view, but not enough for a whole and human understanding. I knew something of his background, and the reason for his arrogance; but not much of the life he had lived.

He came, as I did, from Inverdoon: a town large enough for gossip to be various, and small enough to ensure some accuracy in gossip. His father had been a Warrant Officer in the Navy, a man of twenty or twenty-five years' service when, in the autumn of 1914, at the very beginning of the first Great War, his ship

was torpedoed and he came to hospital in Inverdoon. With some thirty other early casualties he lay in a ward in the Royal Infirmary, and he and his fellow patients—when to be wounded was still a distinction—were cosseted and comforted by many visitors.

His most persistent visitor was a Miss M . . ., a lady no longer in her first youth, who was the fifth of five daughters of the Professor of Biblical History, a shabby and eccentric old man. Miss M . . . fell headlong in love with the robust and handsome sailor, and when he was discharged, unfit for further service, she married him in secret and brazenly brought him back to Inverdoon. Their marriage scandalized University circles and the Old Town, and shocked them more when Mr. Malone set up as a bookmaker—Turf Accountant, he called himself—in Spitalgate, midway between Queen's College and the Cathedral, and soon prospered.

This I know because we lived next door, and the increasing wealth of Mr. Malone was our endless source of envy and speculation.

Torquil was his only son, and when I came to Morissey—three or four years after Torquil and Isobel had bought their house and settled there—I quickly found that he hated, more than most things, to be reminded of his parentage and upbringing. To begin with, he openly resented my presence, because I knew too much about him and reminded him, every time he saw me, of what I knew. Then, for a while, he ignored me.

He had left home as soon as he left school, when he was seventeen, and gone abroad. For several years we heard nothing of him, but suddenly he jumped into fame with a first novel that became a bestseller and attracted a lot of serious attention when it became known that the author was only twenty-one and had already seen more of the world than most people do in a long life.

From Inverdoon he had gone to Calcutta, as clerk in a shipping firm—that was true—but then the narrative, as it grew more various, became less dependable. He had, it seemed, been a journalist for some time, a reporter working in Shanghai and possibly Vancouver. It was commonly said that he had lived a wild life; and detail was filled in according to imagination. Whatever the truth of it, *John Gaffikin* gave evidence of a more than academic knowledge of life, and made a small fortune for Torquil. In 1940, when he went into the Army, he showed again his remarkable aptitude for success, and was quickly promoted. So much I knew, and a little more . . . .

I did my work, and went home to supper. Then, I settled down to read, and then the bell rang; and when I went to the door, there was Torquil.

I took him into my small sitting-room—furnished so cheaply, in such bare sufficiency, compared with the opulence of his house—and I saw with relief that he was sober; or in that settled, meridian state of drink that, for a drunkard, may be near sobriety.

He said at once, " I've come to tell you how grateful I am for your advice. I've talked things over with Isobel, though she knows

nothing of what I told you—she wouldn't understand—and I've decided to go away. I'm going tomorrow. To London first, and then, if I can find a slow cargo boat, to South America. I've never been to South America. Perhaps I'll go up the Amazon."

"Shall I give you a drink?" I asked. "A small one? There's only brandy."

"A small one for me and a big one for you," he said. "You've earned more than that today."

He smiled as if he were wholly at his ease, and to be easy was his natural habit. But that was his way—he had the faculty of contradicting himself, and though he was often arrogant and brutally egotistic, he could suddenly show gentleness and a sort of innocence. He was usually, though not always, very gentle with Isobel: kind to her, and amused by stupidities that, if they had been treated with cold tolerance, would have got more than they deserved.

In his utter absorption in fishing he was innocence itself—there's a fragment of my own portrait, I suppose—and to find him lying in a ditch with his field-glasses pointed to a flock of field-fares was to find not only innocence but humility; for in spite of his interest in birds, and the hours he spent watching them, he never learnt much about them, and admitted his ignorance.

But his arrogance could be embarrassing, and I was completely puzzled by his regular church-going till I discovered that he believed, quite firmly, in a family relationship with God. God, being an author too, was the chief of his clan: it was as simple as that.

He talked for a while about his intended voyage, and then, with a change of tone, said, "I've wasted, utterly wasted, the last six months. My life's been null and void. Boredom and blank despair: that's all I've felt. I can't even believe in myself and the worth of my own work—and that's like the fall of Lucifer, isn't it?"

"Don't tell me I'm to blame. I've heard that too often."

"I'm in no state of mind to blame anyone. I haven't the force of will to discriminate, or the energy to decide. But you can't disclaim all responsibility."

I could, of course—but not without a very embarrassing argument. The simple, unappetizing fact of the matter was that I had once spent a couple of nights with Torquil in a Glasgow hotel, and then refused to have anything more to do with him. After my first year or two in Morissey, when he had ignored me, he began to show signs of interest, which presently became a specific interest.

I was, I admit, attracted to him—as many women, in my circumstances, would have been—but also I knew how vulnerable I was. In my position I couldn't afford a scandal—that was obvious—and after one or two unpleasant scenes I thought I had convinced him of it. But then I went to Glasgow, for a few days' shopping, and Torquil was there to meet me. We dined together,

and in the remoteness, the anonymity, the irresponsibility of that vast hive of people, I gave in.

But two nights were enough. Oh, more than enough. I wasn't inexperienced, and I'm not unduly sensitive—but I'm not a troop of girls in a brothel, and that's what he needed. How Isobel has put up with him I don't understand; unless her stupidity is so dense, unfeeling, and imperceptive that it gives her a sort of invincible innocence. But Torquil and I quarrelled bitterly—noisily, vulgarly—and his vanity was wounded to the core.

I left him in Glasgow, and went back to Morissey in profound relief; for the temptation he had offered was now gone for ever. But that he would not accept, or could not understand, and when, a week or so later, he came home, it was to parade in romantic despair and beg me to have pity on him. He made a great fool of himself, and hugged his disappointment as if he loved it. Perhaps he did. Perhaps it was a new experience, the first time a woman had disappointed him.

He told me, in solemn anger, that I was ruining his life, and implied that no mere woman's whimsy should ever obstruct or exasperate a life that was held in trust for English literature. But he got no sympathy.

Then Isobel told me he was drinking heavily—more heavily than before—and said, " It's my opinion that he's bored with this new book he's writing. He feels he ought to do it, and doesn't want to, so he drinks instead." And that, I've little doubt, was the truth of it.

But now, with him in my small and shabby room, on the verge of departure and still sorry for himself, I could say nothing of all this; and quickly turning myself into a whole-time medical practitioner—a calm and sagacious country doctor—I gave him good advice instead. I told him not to drink too much on the voyage, and wrote a prescription for sleeping-pills.

My professional manner soon bored him, and after another small brandy-and-water he got up and said good night. I wished him luck and a happy return; and closed the door behind him.

Torquil Malone

I could find no ship to take me to South America, and instead of the Amazon went to Kenya and South Africa. By sea—a dull voyage—to Mombasa, six weeks with a dim cousin in Nyeri, a trip to Uganda, a month with an old friend in Bulawayo, then a couple of weeks in Cape Town, and the voyage home; which was duller than the outward journey.

All this was wasted time, except for a few hours. I got small enjoyment, and nothing else from it: no fertile thought, no propulsive or breeding view of humanity and its purpose.

The few hours of real value were spent at the Victoria Falls, where I discovered that I had no wish or will to commit suicide. I had been worried by the apparent ease with which that abominable bird had tempted me to look down, from my boat, into the cool,

green, enticing depths of the loch; and, sorely perplexed, I had wondered if I harboured in my mind a secret thought of self-destruction.

To test myself, I went deliberately to the Falls, and on either side of them stood, with intention, beside their superb and natural solicitation to death.

I stood, first on one side, then on the other, of that stupendous gorge—that break in the earth's crust, that breach of time and solid nature—and let the chorused invitation of the waters to join them in dissolution fill my ears; let the sight of the burden of water transmuted by a great height into the weightless beauty of immaculate whiteness fill my eyes; and in the sober consciousness of my mind I felt no impulse to throw myself down. There was, within my deepest self, no thought, impulse, or hidden desire of suicide. That I knew, having faced the temptation of height and beauty and dissolving waters.

Of the rest of my voyage I shall say little. I behaved, on the whole, with a bourgeois common sense. I rarely drank too much, and only twice retreated from the common form of good behaviour: once in the darkest African parts of Kampala, once in Johannesburg, where I found opportunity for that sort of orgiastic pleasure which, I confess, has been a recurrent temptation throughout my life. But my average of behaviour was good, and though I got little enjoyment and less instruction from my journey, I came back to Morissey in a better state of health, both of mind and body, than when I left it. And Isobel I met with a new hunger of love—a love compact of gratitude as much as of desire—and every morning she was born anew.

But now I must speak in practical fashion, in a matter-of-fact, down-to-earth style of words, and admit that I was still a little frightened. For a few days I watched, nervously, for the return of the Plover. But he did not come again. The lapwings, the ordinary green plover, had by then diminished in numbers: there is a local migration that increases their number in the spring, reduces it in autumn. The migrants had gone, and by a rationalization of my fear I concluded that my Sociable Plover, the fetch or sending, had gone with them. My nervous fear—the tension of fear—relaxed.

Superficially I was irritated by the presence of Isobel's sister Beatrice. Beatrice is an artist, a painter in the abstract style, and twice a year we had her to stay with us for several weeks. Beatrice was there when I returned to Morissey, and stayed three weeks. A few days after she left I had a dream that was more like visible and palpable experience than any other dream I have ever had: more real, in dreaming and in memory, than many days of open-eyed experience.

I was on the shore below the strip of meadow that fringes the loch, fishing thigh-deep in wading-boots, and Beatrice, watching, was sitting on a tumbled dyke behind me. Fish were rising, but not, as I thought, in a normal way. It looked as if they were being hunted by some larger fish. I was casting with a long line, to try

and reach them, when Beatrice cried, " There's something under the water! "

Then the surface was broken by a white and noble head, and with a ponderous assurance, with an ideal and perfect dignity —scattering the wetness of his fur with a shake and a shiver that surrounded him with a cloud of diamond drops—a great white hound came ashore. I retreated as he advanced, and our movement was slow, hieratic, as if in solemn procession.

Beatrice, in a foolish voice, cried, " Oh, it's a seal! "

But I, quite calmly, said, " No, it's the Great White Hound of Cuchullin."

It had a smallish head, shaped like a polar bear's, straight and heavy forelegs, a hound's body, and enormous, loping thighs. Its wet fur, round its neck and shoulders, was tightly curled as a Bedlington terrier's; but when I stroked it, it became smooth and wavy. I put my right arm round the hound's neck, and gave it my other hand to nuzzle. It was very gentle, but its teeth were as sharp as a puppy's.

Then I looked round, and saw the two children running down from the house. The elder was wearing fancy-dress that imitated the mask and skin of a panda—a dress she had been given for a children's party—and covering the hound's eyes I shouted to them, " Go away, you mustn't make fun of him! You mustn't hurt his feelings! "

They went back to the house, and I clapped the hound on his shoulder. He was very friendly, and laid his nose in the crook of my arm. His eyes looked into mine with gentle confidence. There was no arrogance in his demand, but only trust, and I was conscious that I had become his servant. This knowledge gave me pleasure, and made me feel important.

Then the hound turned, and shook himself again, and slowly waded into the loch. He looked back at me, with the same confiding glance, and I began to follow him. But Beatrice, with a loud cry, seized me with angry hands, and pulled me to the meadow grass. I struggled with her, and we fell. When I woke up, Isobel was in my arms and I pushed her from me, exclaiming, " Where's Beatrice gone? And where is the Hound? "

I got up and went to the window. The loch lay calm and empty, a silky, rippled grey, and I felt desolate, as though cheated of some great prize. As though a door to bliss had been closed in my face.

I could hardly believe the slow admission of my mind that I had been dreaming. Night after night I dreamt of my dream—by some deep division of my half-unconscious mind seeing it as a dream, seeing it in perspective—and this reiteration made it, after every recollection, more oddly real. By dreaming of my dream, I turned it into something like actual experience; and this made me frightened to go near the loch shore.

What emerged most strongly from an ever-thickening, impacted fantasy was the confiding look in the White Hound's returning eye —the look that bade me follow, and knew that I would—and my

consciousness that I was willing to go with him and be drowned.

I felt, too, a mounting, quite irrational hatred of Beatrice for the part she had played in my dream. I could not endure to hear Isobel speak of her, and one day when Isobel was out and I found, among a little pile of letters that the postman had brought, a letter from Beatrice, I tore it across, unopened in its envelope, and threw the pieces on the fire. Then I began to wonder if I was going mad—and for the first time felt surprised to remember how immediately, in my dream, I had recognized the great water-beast as the Hound of Cuchullin.

Not for many years, not since I was very young, had I read anything of Irish mythology, and with something like consternation I realized that I didn't know if Cuchullin had in fact been attended by a hound.

I had on my shelves the old, massive volumes of the Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and when I looked him up I discovered that he himself, Cuchullin, was the hound. He, the young hero, had killed the hound of Culann the Smith, and then served as watchdog to the Smith till a whelp of the dead dog could grow to strength and maturity. But why had I fetched him from the depths of my mind, and changed him, in the abyss of consciousness, to a water-beast? Had I been looking for a hero to redeem myself? It would, indeed, be a task for a hero.

I felt, increasingly, a disablement of mind or will that invaded and infected my physical parts. As I grew more frightened of going out and approaching the temptation of the loch—the temptation of waters that now were dark and seemed the deeper for their darkness—my arms and legs grew torpid and heavy, disinclined for exertion, and I spent most of the day, and every day, in bed . . .

Anne McQueen

I was still in my dressing-gown, after soaking for an hour in a hot bath, when Isobel rang me up and asked me to come and see Torquil again. I was looking forward to a good breakfast, with a book propped on the teapot, and a day which, by tidy management, could be almost idle till my evening surgery. But Isobel was insistent, my breakfast was spoilt by irritation, and I was in a bad temper when I went to see him.

Isobel, to begin with, took me into her own small sitting-room, and closed the door with the portentous care of someone about to reveal a state secret. "Torquil," she said, "has been drinking too much."

"My dear Isobel," I said, "you can't expect me to register surprise and consternation when you tell me that."

"No," she said, "Torquil has often drunk too much, just to get out of the ordinary middle-class measure of life. But lately, for the last couple of weeks, he's gone too far. He's drinking in bed."

"In your bed?"

"Oh no! I wish he was. He hasn't slept with me for a fort-

night. He's sleeping in his dressing-room, and he hardly ever gets up except to go downstairs for another bottle of whisky. He's too frightened, you see."

I listened, with growing impatience, to her confused and meaningless story—in her incapacity to give a clear and reasonable account of what he was suffering, she looked extraordinarily young, innocent, and, from a man's point of view, I suppose, desirable—and interrupted her to ask, "Does he know I'm here?"

"Yes, I told him you were coming. He was angry, at first, and then he said, 'All right, I'd like to see her.' He can be so sweet, he quite disarms you, doesn't he?"

I had never been in Torquil's dressing-room before. I had been to see Isobel in their bedroom, and that, by the opulence of its furniture, had slightly disgusted me. There was a double bed of inordinate size, with silk hangings, velvet curtains on the windows, a French sofa, a dressing-table of ridiculous luxury, and a wardrobe with an open door that disclosed hillocks of silk underclothes. I compared it with my own bare room—my skimpy chest of drawers—and felt a revulsion that may, in part, have been a mask for jealousy.

But when I saw Torquil's dressing-room, and him in bed there, I was, in a quite simple, instinctive way, antagonized by the richness of its comfort. It was, absurdly, all in white—ivory, cream, or white, except for a quilt of gold satin and one great picture full and overfull of peaches, pineapples, purple grapes, a pheasant or two, and yellow plums; and staring from the general pallor, spectacular in its pride and luxury, there was the enormous, splendid skin of a polar bear, deep-furred, silky and resilient, with the cruel, proud head mounted to show its teeth in an eternal snarl.

Even in so rich a room it dominated, made the first impression, and with hardly a glance at him—but I saw he had not shaved for two or three days—I was down on my knees to stroke the smooth white head and ask, "Where did you get this?"

"It's more interesting than I am, isn't it?" he said. "I've had it for a long time—and I still like it."

"Well," said Isobel, "I had better leave you." And went out, and closed the door.

"I've never seen anything that made me so immediately envious," I said; and reluctantly got up. "But you're the patient, not the polar bear. Tell me what's been happening."

"In the first place, how glad I am to see you! I should have asked you to come and help me—oh, long ago—but I was too ashamed. It's very shameful, for a man of my sort, to tell a woman that he has been frightened into illness—frightened by a dream. But that's the truth of it."

"Are you drinking a lot?"

"More than I have ever done."

"Because you're frightened?"

"Yes. And, of course, because I like it."

He had, as Isobel said, a quality, a charm, that could not be

denied and was capable of disarming the most unfriendly critic. I, at that moment, felt no touch or breath of friendship for him—a dissolute, unshaven man, stinking of whisky in a room of theatrical luxury—but as he sat up in bed and leaned towards me, and his voice deepened, as it seemed, in honesty and self-reproach, I knew that I must guard myself against the sympathy he would try to evoke; and perhaps could. I looked again at the skin of the polar bear, let envy run into my heart, and thought: Envy will keep sympathy at bay.

"You had better tell me," I said, "something about your dream."

"It's going to be difficult," he said, "because it wasn't like a dream. It was much more like something that happened in another dimension of reality. An impalpable dimension, but not less real because of that."

I listened to his story. He told it so well that, even to me, the Hound seemed to exist and have its own personality. It wasn't till he had finished, and I had given him a weak whisky-and-water, for telling the story had exhausted him, that I saw the obvious association.

I waited till he grew calmer, more composed, and then I asked him, "How long have you had this rug?"

"Oh, a long time."

"Where did you get it?"

I waited a full minute before he answered. Then he said, "It was after the war. When I was in Berlin."

"Does it remind you of anything?"

"Well, of course. Of Berlin. Of everything that happened there."

"But of anything in particular? Among the things you remember in a general way, is it associated with any particular event?"

Again he was silent for a long time—I supposed he was thinking, jogging his memory—before he said, "No."

And now I must make a confession; for what I said next was not dictated by medical theory and a doctor's professional insight, but by the stark envy I had felt when I first saw the enchantment of that great, white, silky skin. I had wanted—absurdly, but quite positively, with a surge of adolescent or romantic abandonment to sheer physical desire—to undress and lie on it, naked; and I could hardly endure the knowledge that Torquil owned it.

So I said to him, "You ought to get rid of it. You know as much about the unconscious as I do, so I needn't go into tiresome explanation. But it seems probable that the rug is associated with something you want to forget—that consciously, perhaps, you have forgotten—and your compulsive dream of a Great White Hound, with its obvious likeness to a polar bear, is the work of your unconscious mind rebelling against a prohibition you have put on it. So get rid of the rug. It's a constant reminder—if my guess is a good one—of something of which you don't want to be reminded. So burn it, or give it away, and stop tormenting that part of your

mind which, like the butt-end of an iceberg, lies out of sight and communication."

"No," he said, "I can't do that."

"I'll give you some sleeping-pills—you like nembutal, don't you?—but that's only a palliative," I said. "I want you to go for a good walk every day—get Isobel to go with you—and try not to drink anything before six o'clock. But what really matters, of course, is to find out what's frightening you, and eliminate that. We'll have to work by trial and error; and for a start I suggest—my advice is—that you get rid of the rug. Burn it, or sell it."

At that moment, I believe, I had in my mind the thought, the hope, that I might buy it. But he disappointed me by repeating, "No, that's what I can't do."

"Then nembutal and healthy exercise are all I can offer you," I said. "I'll give Isobel the pills..."

It was not till a week later that Isobel telephoned again and said, "Torquil is going to send away that white bearskin. He asked me to tell you. He's going to send it to London, to be sold for the Lord Mayor's relief fund. I don't know what you said to him, and I don't know what it all means, but I feel much happier. It's a lovely rug, but I've never liked it—perhaps because he would keep it in his own room—and I'm very glad it's going. For the last two days he's been hardly human."

I felt angry and self-contemptuous when I heard that my prescription—designed primarily for my benefit, not his—had been accepted, and my profit was to be nil. The rug might indeed be a clue to the psychological origin of his dream, but the purpose of my advice had been to get the rug for myself. And I felt resentful of defeat and ashamed of the shabbiness of my motive. It was a very unpleasant moment.

I avoided both of them for some weeks, but the tantalizing thought, the damned enchantment, of that white luxury of arctic fur returned to me night after night as if I had been infected by the compulsion of his unholy dream.

It was shortly before Christmas that I read, in the *Medical Journal*, a tendentious, kite-flying article on psychosomatic distempers in Melanesia by R. J. Piers Ryan—and recognized "Paddy" Ryan, whom I had known in Berlin: an Irish doctor of ebullient temper and sometimes brilliant intuition whose gifts were often obscured by the triviality of his interests. He had a village appetite for gossip, an old woman's nose for scandal ...: and, having remembered this, it occurred to me that he might have known Torquil, or something of him.

I sat down after supper and wrote him a long letter. I told him about myself, I spoke admiringly of his article, and presently said something of my interesting patient. "A man you may have known in Berlin," I said. I didn't go into details, I only said that Torquil was suffering from a neurosis about which I could do very little unless I knew more of the background. "And that's where you may be able to help me," I wrote.

Ryan had a genius for gathering, sifting, and remembering the news of the day, and he never forgot a face or a good story. I flattered him, as was right and proper in the circumstances, but I went too far, perhaps, when I wrote: " How much I would like to see you again! You must, I suppose, have leave from time to time, and when your next leave is due, think seriously of what Morissey can offer. I'll promise you brown-trout fishing far above the average, and if you're lucky a run of sea-trout in early July that you'll remember all your life."

I addressed my letter care of the journal, and got no answer till the end of February; and that, when it came, was cryptic. He wrote: " I never met Torquil Malone, but I know all that was said about him, and if you want the substance of it, read the Second Book of Samuel, chapter xi, and ponder the order, *Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle.* In his case Uriah and Bethsabe were Poles—and that, for the present, is all I shall tell you.

" Bless you, dear Anne, for the invitation to fish! I shall, beyond doubt or peradventure, come to Morissey next June, when my leave is due . . ."

I looked up the Bible my mother had given me and read some of the Second Book of Samuel. The eleventh chapter tells how King David fell in love with Bathsheba, or Bethsabe as Ryan called her, and slept with her. Her husband, Uriah, was a good soldier, and when David sent him up the line again, he went willingly, and was killed. And David got Bethsabe, who much preferred a live king to a dead colonel, or whatever Uriah had been.

But it took me some time to digest Ryan's assertion—a vaguely drawn but seemingly confident assertion—that Torquil, in some sort of way, had played David to an unknown Pole; whose wife, by inference, he had coveted. And when I had digested it, it meant, perhaps curiously, very little to me. All I felt was a justification and stiffening of my dislike for him.

A day or two later I dined with Torquil and Isobel, and with a rather grudging pride considered the marvellous improvement in his health. He looked well and happy, and I could, I suppose, claim to have cured him—though I was doubtful if my medical colleagues would accept " Remove the bearskin " as a scientific prescription. But I was glad to see him better, and rather against my will I was a little moved by the evident affection that still held them. They were going to Jamaica for a month.

" A reward to Isobel," he said, " for the persistency of her kindness and the loyalty of her devotion to such an utterly worthless creature as I am."

He and Isobel came back at the beginning of April, looking to us, still white and drawn by winter, indecently healthy. They were bright-eyed, sunburnt, deft and lively of speech and body: full of anecdotes, full of a newly won vitality. And we who had sustained a northern winter, and done our work in winter, were lacklustre, pale of skin, and unhealthy of aspect. I liked him less and less, and saw very little of him until the second half of May

when, as usual in the beneficence of returning summer, my practice diminished and I was able to spend two or three days a week fishing.

Then, inevitably, we met on this or that favourite shore of the loch, ate our sandwiches together, and talked of fish and flies; or bewailed the difficulty nowadays of getting good gut and debated the best knots for nylon.

That he was now completely cured, I had no doubt whatever, and because I am not the sort of person who is everlastingly worried by what can't be explained, I no longer thought much about the mystery of a psychical obsession—a reiterated or double obsession —that could be explained very simply in terms of witchcraft, but otherwise not at all. One day, indeed, when we had finished our lunch and the loch was so glassily calm that it was useless to think of fishing, we sat for an hour and watched the terns hawking flies, and listened to the creak of the lapwings' flight; and on a sudden impulse I asked, "You haven't seen the Sociable Plover again, have you?"

"No," he said, and looked at me with an expression of great gravity and resolution that was, perhaps, a little forced. "I keep a good look-out, and so far there's been no sign of it. But if it does come back, I know what to do. It won't get the better of me again."

I was surprised to hear his reply come so quick and serious. I had expected, I think, a throw-away, half-laughing disclaimer of any interest in so remote a matter; but so far from being remote, it lay on the very surface of his consciousness, and as if I had been wakened by some inexplicable noise at night, I felt, for a moment, the tense and hollow sensation of uncharted fear. Not fear for him, but an absurd fear that I too might be touched by supernatural things. I said nothing, however, except—in a voice of bluff scepticism—"I don't suppose you'll see any more of that bird." And then: "There's a fish rising off the point there. I'm going to put a fly over it."

When I got home I found a telegram from Paddy Ryan asking, "Can I be assured of friendly welcome and simple accommodation if I arrive June 15 for three weeks?" I went to Mrs. Malcolm, in the village, who takes summer boarders "just to oblige my friends," as she is careful to explain; and, having persuaded her, quite easily, to put him up, replied to a London address, "Both await you."

It was on the morning of the 15th that I saw Torquil with a gun on his arm. I had had to deal with a boy who had fallen and broken his wrist, and on my way back, on a little rise of the road that overlooks his house, I saw him going down to the loch. He was carrying a rod in his right hand, and in the crook of his left arm a shotgun. I could see it quite clearly.

I didn't stop. I felt that if I got out, and followed him to ask his reason, I would embarrass both of us as deeply as if I were to turn a corner and discover him in some gross indecency. I drove on.

Torquil Malone

God alone—Who has made all—knows the intricacies of the human condition: the true state of us who are bound to history. I believe in my salvation, though I have been guilty of evil deeds. For also I have done good work that has served God's purpose, and my books have fortified many men and revived their appetite for life. That is my justification, and faith is my passport.

Mystery envelops us, but I have peace again. I drink a little, and sometimes more than a little; but only for the contentment and joy of drinking. Not for six months have I drunk for the cloudy comfort of drunkenness and the death of the mind in drink. I have gone back to work, and since we came home from Jamaica I have been working with my old, forgotten zest. This is the best of my novels, and nearly finished now.

My eyes are wide open again, as they were in youth, and in the early morning I watch, in the birth of day, the birth of a new world. A new world every morning, and the scent of meadowsweet; and in the evening a rain-goose crying to the twilight. The great circle of the sky is our tent, and we, the nomads of inscrutable destiny, have rich pasture for the flocks and herds of our multifarious thoughts that graze on time and circumstance.

But I am wary in my happiness, my weapons are at hand. I shall not yield again to the maleficence of their witchcraft, and if their fetch returns—if from the summer sky that accursed bird drops down with muttering wings to tempt and call me to annihilation and betrayal of my good life—a gun will answer it. No parley with it, no hesitation, but true aim, a shot . . .

Anne McQueen

My first sight of Paddy Ryan was, I admit, disappointing. I had been looking forward, with a growing eagerness that I knew to be ridiculous, to seeing him again, and the first effect of seeing him through the eyes, not through imagination, was to deflate the gay balloon of my anticipation. I had forgotten that he was so comically ugly, or perhaps his ugliness had been modified and held in check by uniform, and now was released and amplified by his own choice of clothes.

He wore a green-and-yellow tweed suit of a pattern that only a really big man could have carried, and a very small cap perched ludicrously above his deeply tanned face and great blond moustache. But he waved to me from the steamer with exuberant friendliness, and when he came down the gangway I was almost, if not wholly, comforted against my disappointment by the gleaming vitality of his eyes. I had forgotten they were so bright a blue: the very colour of speedwell.

We talked and laughed all the way home: talked incessantly, of Berlin and his new ocean parish in the south seas, and of old friends whom I could scarcely remember, and, of course, of fishing.

He had brought a whole battery of rods, and a bag full of reels and fly-boxes. We had fly-boxes open all over the tea-table, and

whenever he stopped talking of Germany or the New Hebrides it was to ask if a Blue Zulu or a Black Pennell would do better, and what was the proper size to use?

I found him exhausting, to begin with, and it was with a feeling of drawing breath again that I drove him to Mrs. Malcolm's, and left him there. But he was to come back to dinner.

I had gone to some trouble to give him, on his first night in Morissey, a really good dinner—to show him that we, in the western isles, knew as well as others how to live, and could enjoy a proper table—and Paddy Ryan won my entire forgiveness for the vulgarity of his suit, his comical face, and his unresting tongue by his appreciation of all I put before him. There was trout, and duckling, and a cheese soufflé. I was showing off, and gave him two wines, white and red. There were flowers in the room, and I had a new frock—and Paddy, bless his heart, took notice of them all.

I was almost in love with him when we took our coffee to the fire and settled down to talk of Bethsabe and Uriah the Hittite: of Torquil in Berlin.

I had been wondering how to start, when Paddy exclaimed, "But tell me about Malone! Is he still here, and can I go and see him? I'll be discreet, I promise that. I won't say a word of what I know about him. Or, to be strict and accurate, of what I've heard. For some of the stories would be true enough, but others, it may be, were far-fetched. There was a lot of gossip, and I know it all. But I'll be very discreet."

"About what, in particular, must you be discreet?"

"He was a man for the women—but he wasn't the only one, of course. And he had a job that brought him in contact with the Germans and the Russians too; and some thought he did a brilliant job, but others said he knew too much and went too far. That could have been jealousy, in some cases, for he was well thought of by those high up, and everyone agreed that he was quite fearless. But there's one story I heard, and if it's true, then on that occasion he did go too far. Too far to be forgiven by any mortal judge, though what God's mercy can stretch to, none of us knows."

"Why do you think the story true?"

"It was told me by a man I trust. A man who, though he hadn't legal proof in his hands—no action was taken against Malone—was in a position to form a just opinion of what had happened."

"And that was—?"

"The old story, all over again, of King David and Bethsabe and the good soldier she was married to. Only he wasn't a soldier this time; he was an engineer. He and his wife were Poles, and she—I've seen her photograph—was a tearing beauty. The sort you see once in a lifetime. Well, Malone got them out of the Russian zone, and fell in love with her. He had a flat of his own, and he knew how to look after himself.

"Those who had been there said he lived in sinful luxury—on the edge of the ruins of Berlin!—in a sort of whore's paradise, if you'll

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forgive me, of white silk curtains, and white rugs on the floor—"

"White rugs?"

"Or so they said, but that may have been exaggeration. They may have been piling it on a bit, with a memory of something they'd seen on a film. But whatever the furniture may have been, the girl was always there; and by and by her husband disappeared. The story was that he had made his peace with the Russians—thanks to Malone!—and gone back to Poland, to a good job there, for they needed engineers badly. And she, in the meantime, was happy enough in her whore's paradise; and who can blame her, after what she'd gone through?"

"Do you think she was enticed by the white rugs on the floor?"

"They're an attraction for some women; or so I've heard. But let that go, for I don't know if the rugs were fiction or fact. But what's true enough is that after five or six months she and Malone fell out. It wasn't an open quarrel to begin with, but the sort of quarrel that smoulders for a while and then leaps up like a dull wood fire that you help to a blaze by pouring paraffin on it.

"Well, there were two British officers there when the flames came out, and what she said, in the roar and heat of her anger, was that Malone, so far from finding her husband a good, comfortable job in Lodz or Poznan or somewhere like that, had sold him to the Russians, and they had sent him to a new hydroelectric construction camp down in the most godless, desolate country about the bottom end, or ends, of the Volga, where it runs into the Caspian Sea."

"Is that true?"

"I don't know, but the man who told me isn't a liar by choice. And there's worse to follow. For the girl herself and her young son—did I tell you she had a child?"

"No."

"But yes, there was a boy, about five or six years old—he'll be sixteen or more by now, if he's still alive—and he, they say, took after his mother, and looked like a cross between an angel and a Spanish gipsy. Well, a day or two later they both vanished, and were never seen again."

"What happened to them?"

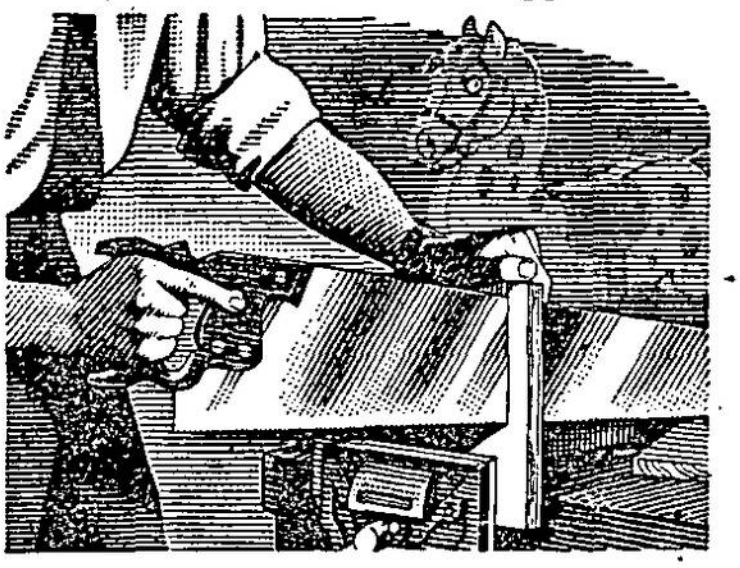
"The man who told me most of this—the man who ought to know—believes they went the same way as the husband. That, to oblige Malone, the Russians took charge of them, and because the Russians have a crazy idea of the proper pattern of life—sometimes it looks like logic, and sometimes like farce—they were probably sent down to the swamps and wilderness about the mouths of the Volga to join Uriah the Hittite."

"Torquil can't have done that!"

"He was in the gravest sort of danger if the girl was out of control, and talking against him, and if what she was saying was true."

"Can it have been?"

"The man who told me thought so. And Malone, who'd been highly regarded till then, was removed to a quieter sector, and a



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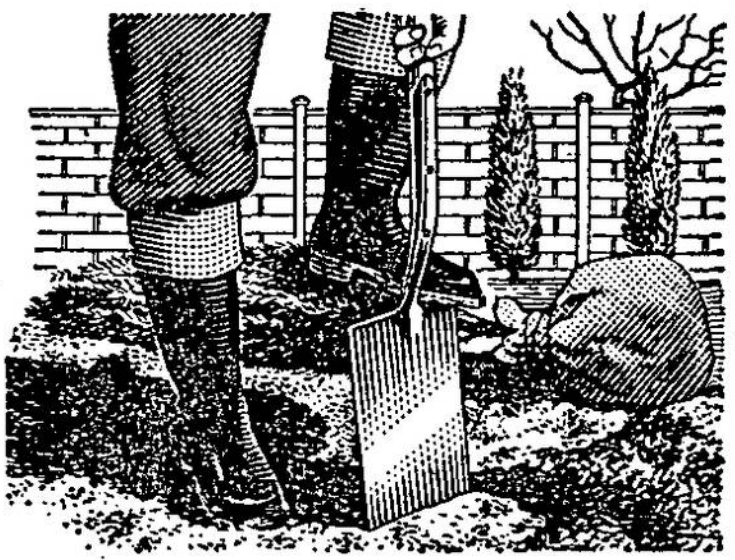

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month or two later went back to civil life. At his own request, of course."

I had a bottle of whisky, which I hadn't intended to open, but we both fell into a sort of stricken silence from which there seemed to be no release; and to open a little wicket-gate of escape from the awful consciousness of what Ryan had been saying, whisky seemed the only thing.

I gave him a Highlander's dram, and myself as much; and then I told him—not about the polar bearskin; of that, for some dark reason, I had no wish to speak—but the full story of Torquil's haunting by the Sociable Plover, and Torquil's belief that it was something he called a "fetch."

That opened another sluice-gate, for in the south seas Paddy Ryan had dabbled enthusiastically in the magic and witchcraft practised in Melanesia, and with an Irishman's propensity to accept the supernatural—"to win freedom from the bondage of mundane causality by subscribing to a supra-rational volition," as someone has put it—he had wholly accepted the possibility of magical "possession," and was quite prepared to believe in the reality of fetches and sendings. He told several tales to substantiate his belief, and perhaps they were true. But I, by then, was tired out and half asleep.

"In Scotland, too," he said, "you used to believe. Aren't there stories of haunted men who shot at a fetch with a silver bullet, and a hundred miles away he who sent the fetch was found dead with the bullet in his heart?"

"There may be," I said, "but I don't suppose Torquil loaded a silver bullet this morning."

"You saw him this morning?"

"Yes, and he had a gun under his arm. To go fishing."

"He'll have seen the bird again!"

"Or thought he did. But now, Paddy, I'm nearly asleep—"

"Then we'll meet tomorrow?"

"I can do all I have to do by eleven o'clock, I think . . ."

We met, precisely at eleven, and went down to the loch. There was a light breeze and a broken sky. It was a good fishing-day, and in spite of what I had heard the night before, my spirits rose. I had been tired out by talk—helped, perhaps, by drink—and slept like a child. I had gone to see the boy with a broken wrist, an old man with unseasonable lumbago; and to comfort people who had very little wrong with them, I had made up several bottles of medicine.

I had done my work, I wasn't Torquil's keeper, and the loch was in perfect condition with a new hatch of olives on the water, and the terns and black-headed gulls hawking busily. In full consciousness of happiness we made up our casts, and within forty minutes had three twelve-ounce trout in the boat. We fished farther out, Paddy at the oars, and settled down to a long drift towards Rowan Island and the tiny holms beside it: always my favourite ground.

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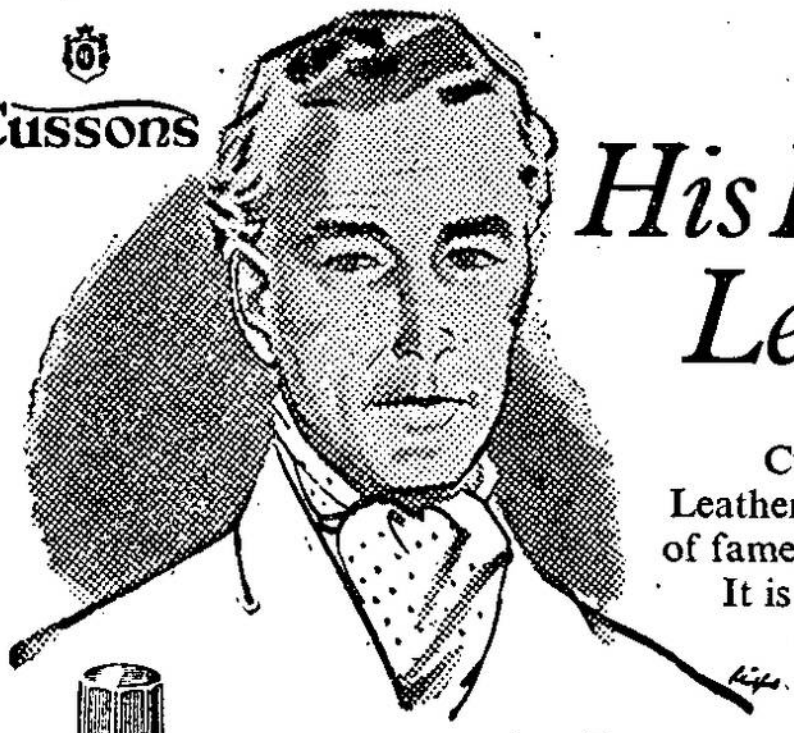

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Paddy insisted on drinking to his success, and handed me a flask. I don't drink while I'm fishing, and don't like the idea of it; but for his sake—he was a good fisherman, very deft and quick, with a wonderful eye—I took a sip and passed it back. We were drifting by the stern, and the view beyond Rowan Island was growing wider. At that moment I caught sight of a boat which I recognized at once as Torquil's. He was about three-quarters of a mile away, and as I said to Paddy, " There's Torquil, away down there to leeward," he stood up, and with a curious gesture pointed to the sky.

Against the light wind we heard the faint puff of a gun shot; but before hearing it we had seen Torquil, standing in the boat, take a pace or two backwards and, most awkwardly, point again to something invisible. His gun—we could not really see it—must have been almost perpendicular, and from his ungainly, ill-balanced stance he toppled to the side and fell over. We saw the rocking of the empty boat, and a moment later we heard, a mere pout of noise against the wind, the second shot.

And " Row, row, oh row! " I cried.

Paddy took to the oars—Torquil used an outboard motor, but

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I had nothing so expensive—and pulled as hard as he could, the sweat starting on his face like dew in the morning. But we had a long way to go—more than three-quarters of a mile—and when we got there, nothing was to be seen but the empty boat, with Torquil's rod and net in it, and on the bottom-boards water that had come in over the side when Torquil fell out. It was drifting very peacefully, with the small waves lapping against it.

"How deep is it here?" asked Paddy.

"It's the deepest part of the loch. About eighteen feet. And he always wore heavy rubber boots."

We rowed to windward again, to the place where, so far as we could judge, Torquil had fallen; and took cross-bearings on it. We peered down into the water, but it was deep and dark, and we could see nothing.

"It wasn't suicide," I said. "I saw him clearly. He was shooting at the bird, and lost his balance."

"Yes," said Paddy, "he swung too far back and tipped over. I saw that too. But where's the bird?"

For five or ten minutes, with solemn perseverance and, half consciously, a desperate wish to explain and justify Torquil's death, we rowed up and down and round in circles, looking for a dead bird in which Paddy firmly believed and I still feared to believe. But we found nothing, and presently, returning to Torquil's boat, baled her out, and with mine in tow started the engine. Sadly, speechless and bewildered, we motored home.

Paddy came with me to tell Isobel, but when she went into hysterics he covered his face and left us; and I had to deal with her. She wept in the very abyss of grief, and I, most unprofessionally, cried in her arms. For if she was grief-stricken, I was struck down by fear and remorse. But before giving way to my womanhood I had sent Paddy for my bag—my professional equipment and strength—and now it was Isobel's turn for sleeping-pills.

I put her to bed; and Paddy gave me his flask. I was distraught, not only by the sudden death of a neighbour—oh, more than a neighbour—but by superstitious fear of a sort that, for most of my life, I have stubbornly and persistently denied, but which, I suppose, is native to some dark rivulet in my veins. I drugged Isobel to sleep, and then could not think what to do but cry on Paddy's shoulder; and it was he who took charge.

He had already told Simmers, the village constable, what had happened, and told him he must drag for the body. He had given him cross-references of where to drag, and before midnight (there is little darkness here in June) poor Torquil's body was brought to the surface. His two side pockets were stuffed full of cartridges, and he still held his gun, the fingers of his right hand clenched on the small of the butt. His rubber boots were full of water, and he had a big flask of whisky in his hip pocket. He carried weight enough to sink him quickly, and I hope he did not suffer much.

On the following day I saw nothing of Paddy till the evening; but all my patients—and I went back to my practice like a runaway

looking for sanctuary—all, every one of them, said to me, "And isn't it like a judgment that the weather changed as soon as they found the body?"

The statement, if not the inference, was true. After midnight the light southerly wind blew up to a southerly gale that roared in the summer air as loud and fierce as a winter storm. Paddy, as he told me in the evening, spent the whole day searching the lee shore for what the gale might bring to land; and found what he was looking for. He found the body of a bird he could not identify, but which, he knew, was not a bird common to our shores.

There would be no legal inquiry into Torquil's death: of that we had already made sure. A simple accident had been the cause of death, and Paddy and I were witnesses to that. So the next morning we went to Torquil's house to discuss the funeral, to comfort Isobel if we could, and in some convenient interval to have a look at Torquil's bird books and identify the pretty body that Paddy had found. I, when I saw it, remembered the picture Torquil had once shown me; but said nothing. In his superficial examination Paddy had discovered no injury to the bird.

Isobel was still in bed, but mournful in a calmer way. Her life, she said, had come to an end, but we spoke of the children—Paddy was very good in this respect—and insisted that her duty to them was now enlarged. We persuaded her to get up for lunch, and while she was dressing we went to Torquil's work-room and looked at his bird books.

We found, in Witherby's *Handbook*, the description of a Sociable Plover and had no difficulty in identifying with it the bird that Paddy had found. There were two or three pages describing its field-characters, food, display, and so forth, and in the paragraph headed *Distribution Abroad* we saw that the statement "Breeds in S.E. Russia (Astrakhan and Samara Govts. to 56 N. in Perm. Govt.)" was heavily underlined; and on the outer margin, again in heavy pencil, the notation: "O dear God!"

Our knowledge of geography, I am sorry to say, was inadequate. We couldn't see the meaning of this. Not till we found an atlas and saw that the province of Astrakhan covered much of the lower Volga. Then Paddy said, "Of course that's it! But we must have positive identification."

It was he who packed and sent the bird to some ornithological society from which, with great promptitude, we got the report: "This is a young adult male Sociable Plover in perfect plumage. It is well nourished. Contents of stomach . . . Cause of death uncertain, but minute perforation of skull in neighbourhood of hind brain suggests it was hit by single pellet, not larger than No. 6. Pellet not lodged in brain. Its discovery in Morissey is of greatest interest because previously no specimen had been reported from Scotland except a single bird in Orkney (3 Nov. 1926). Its measurements are larger than the accepted normal maximum—wing 218 mm., tail 94, bill from feathers 36—and this, of course, adds to the importance of your discovery."

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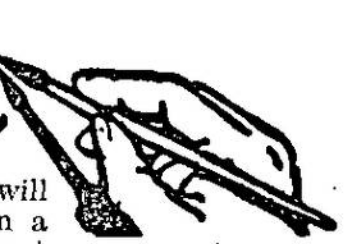

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B.I.E.T., 191c, COLLEGE HOUSE
29-31 Wright's Lane, London, W.8.

BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Paddy Ryan stayed his full three weeks, and fished with great success. In his last few days, when the sea-trout began to run, he took from our little fast-flowing river seven fish weighing twenty-two pounds, of which the biggest was six and a half, and went off well pleased with himself. But I had no heart to fish.

I have reported what I saw and what I was told, but I have no explanation to offer. Torquil lies like a dark shadow on my memory, but, thank heaven, I have no time to brood over shadows. I am too busy with other people and their ailments to worry overmuch about my own affairs; and, as I have said before, I don't really resent the fact that some of the elements of life are insoluble in reason.

Paddy Ryan went to the London School of Tropical Medicine for a year's course before returning to the New Hebrides, and promised to come back to Morissey. He wrote several times, both to Isobel and me, and shortly before Christmas Isobel rang me up one morning and asked me to lunch.

I went, and after her usual gossip—but she was, I must admit, more sensible and balanced than she used to be when Torquil ruled her life and thought—she said, " Paddy asked me to give you his love and show you this cutting from *The Times*. I can't see what it signifies, but perhaps you will."

It was a small paragraph, and it read:

" Reports of unrest in the Lower Volga basin, briefly mentioned some months ago, are apparently confirmed by an announcement in *Pravda* that full investigation has now been made into the counter-revolutionary demonstration that took place in June in the neighbourhood of Krasny Yar. The demonstration, it is alleged, was entirely the work of foreign agents, who have now made full confession. Apart from them, there was only one fatal casualty, a youth of Polish origin."

In the margin Paddy had written, " Do you think he was killed by a silver bullet? "—and Isobel demanded, " Now what on earth does he mean by that? "

" I don't know," I said. " I really don't know."

" I usually see a joke," said Isobel, " but I can't see that. But perhaps it isn't a joke? "

" No, I don't think it is."

I found it difficult to keep my voice level and unaffected, but with a great effort to seem casual, I asked her, " Does Paddy write to you regularly? "

" Every week," she said, " and sometimes oftener. He is a darling, isn't he? "

" Yes," I said, " a darling." And I felt my heart contract, my bowels shrivel within me.

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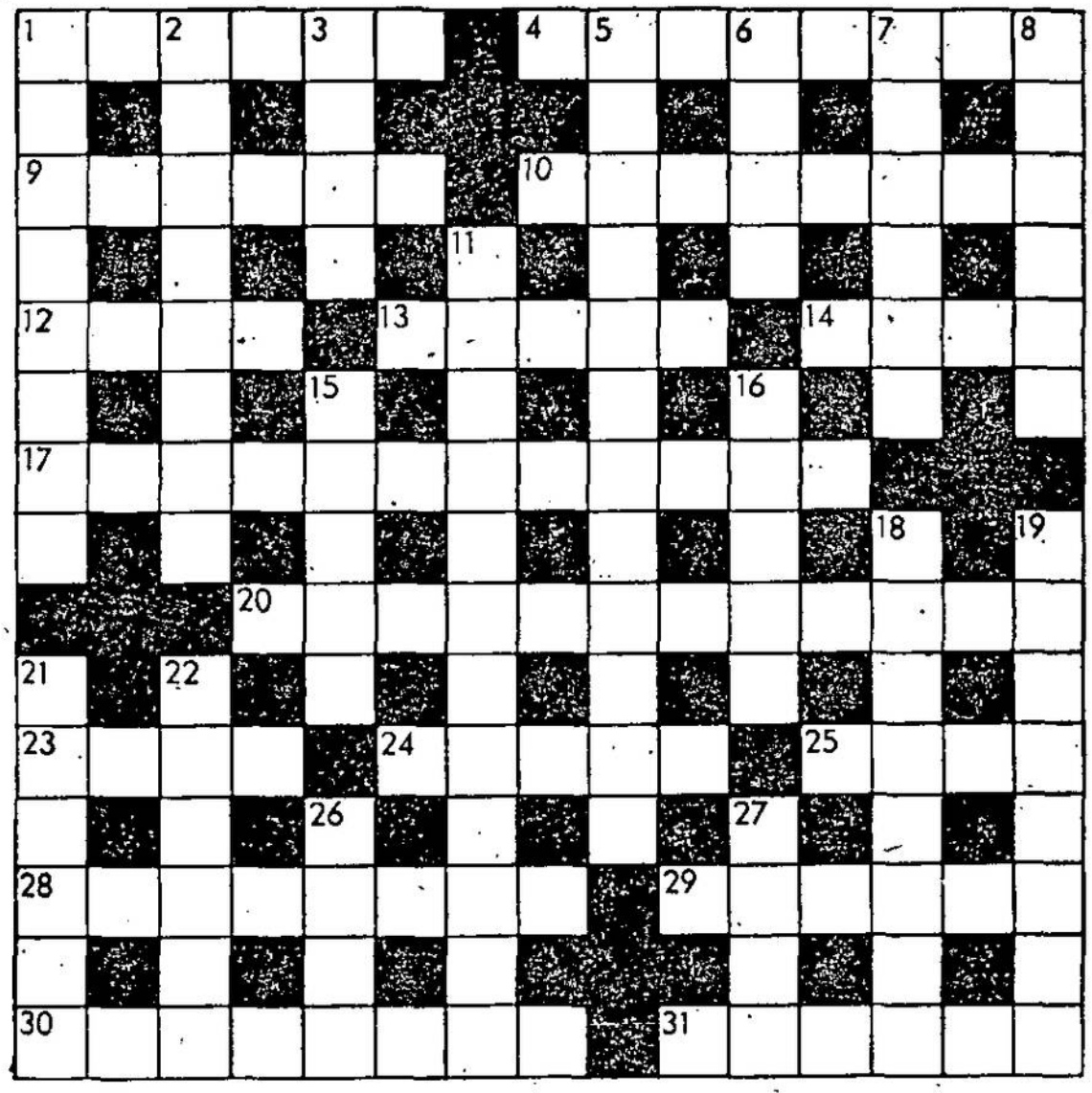
ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 109

★



CLUES

Across

1 Appoint a substitute to put in the river (6).

4 Has a rousing effect; we put an end to it (8).

9 Dickensian shellfish (6).

10 He's skilled at raking in the cash (8).

12 Twenty-fifth part of a quarter (4).

13 Twisted views of married men ? (5).

14 Transaction in timber (4).

17 Not an E. Anglian jorum, though it has quite a kick (7, 5).

20 He need not be the drawing teacher (6,2,4).

23 " —— ! poor Yorick " (Shakespeare) (4).

24 Even after fifty, you're in Scotland (5).

25 Found in a mad zeal for cutting (4).

28 " Too low for envy, for —— too high " (Cowley) (8).

29 Irish lough famed for its trout (6).

30 Hat to keep a shady deal under (8).

31 Describes the driver who hates self-starters ? (6).

Down

1 Makes the cow stand low (8).

2 " Wit: Like a —— in too narrow a sheath " (George Herbert) (8).

3 Part of the rudder holds money (4).

5 He plays behind the half-backs (5-7).

6 Sort of hammer to do damage (4).

7 Make the toiler waste time for a change ? (6).

8 Depend on us returning? Certainly (6).

11 Does the porter hold the bail ? (6-6).

15 There's no such thing as this sort of book, Wilde said (5).

16 Gibe at the grub (5).

18 No barbecue's complete without one (8).

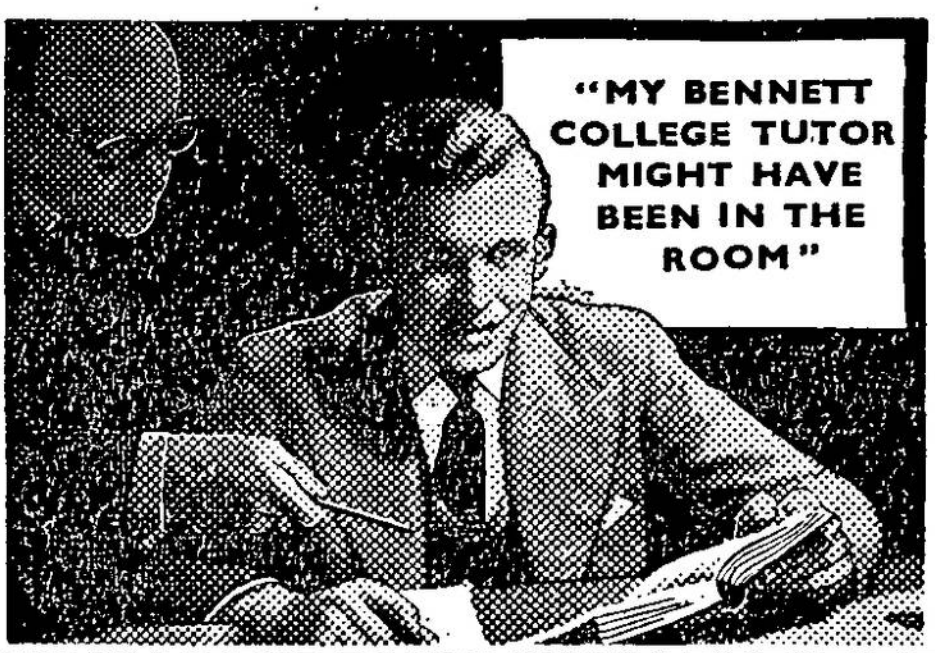
19 May bless the gathering in a garbled way (8).

21 Alice gave the prizes for this race (6).

22 Would hold two quarts of 17 ! (6).

26 Twice used for approval (4).

27 At a time like this I'm a nymph (4).



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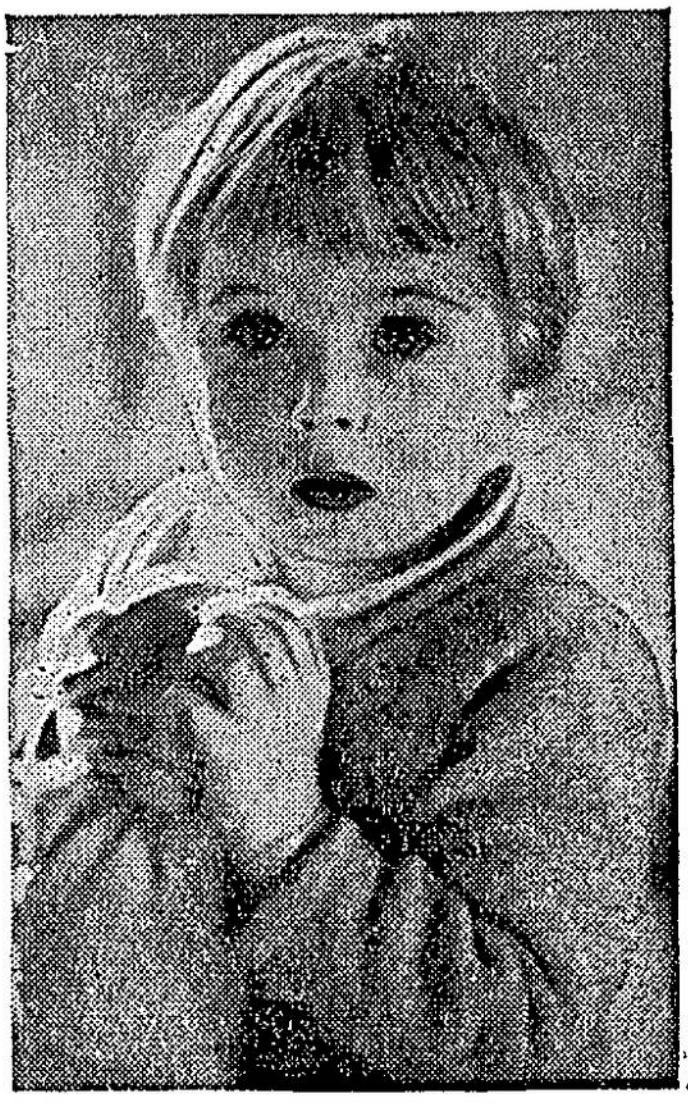

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